



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

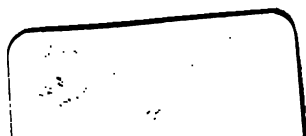
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600053180N





COMING EVENTS

CAST THEIR

SHADOWS BEFORE.

BY

CONWAY KEITH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

T. C. NEWBY, 30, WELBECK STREET,
CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1859.

The right of Translation is reserved.

249. W. 94.



COMING EVENTS.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

“ Make me hear the wild pulsation that I heard before
the strife,
When I felt the days before me, and the tumult of
my life ;
Yearning for the large excitement that the coming
years should yield ;
Eager-hearted as a boy when first he leaves his father’s
field.”—*Tennyson*.

“ Maiden, with the meek brown eyes,
In whose orb a shadow lies
Like the dusk in evening skies ;
Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood sweet.”

Longfellow.

“ HOLLOA there, I say, some of you girls
mend this glove, will you? Here, Constance!

you take it," said Gerald Conyngham, a schoolboy of twelve, throwing a glove across the table to his sister, who sat reading on the other side.

"Very well, presently."

"Oh, you and your presentlys! You'll forget it, sure as a gun."

"No I wont, when do you want it?"

"In half an hour; I shall kick up a great row if it isn't ready—you'd better do it now."

"I can't now; you must wait till Max is dead," replied Constance, looking up from Schiller's Wallenstein, which she was busy reading.

"Till *who's* dead?"

"Max; don't you know Max? Thekla's Max, he's just dying."

"Hang Max!"

"Oh dear me no!" exclaimed Constance, looking scandalized.

Gerald glanced at her a moment, gave a click with his tongue, and then turned to his

youngest sister, Effie, who was copying music at the same table—

“Just like you women—look at that article there, head over ears in a novel.”

“It isn’t a novel,” said Constance rather indignantly.

“What is it then? There’s a hero and a heroine in it, and if that doesn’t make a novel, I don’t know what does.”

“Oh you know nothing about it, Gerald—you’re only a schoolboy!” said Effie, looking wise.

“Gammon! I know as much about things as you, anyhow. See if I don’t, that’s all!”

“Why, you have never read a novel in your life!”

“Pooh! I’ve read lots!—nasty, sickly, sentimental, whining things.”

“Much you know about it,” returned Effie again.

“Oh yes! of course you think it all very fine indeed. All women do—away they go

and fall in love with the hero directly, if he only happens to have moustachios big enough to stuff a sofa cushion!"

"Please, if you wouldn't talk so much," said Constance, looking up from her book, "I really can't read, and I want so to finish it."

"Oh stuff! you are amusing yourself, reading for your pleasure, and I'm talking for mine."

There was no appeal from this logic, so as a last resource, Constance tried stopping her ears with her hands, and returned to Wallenstein.

"What's this book," continued Gerald, pouncing upon a wretched little library book that lay on the table—"pooh!" as he opened it, "'Rose of Glencairn,' squish-squash!"

"Now, how can you tell, Gerald?" exclaimed Effie, standing up for one of her favourite studies.

"Written by a woman," he replied, as if the answer was conclusive.

"Well, and what's the harm if it is?"

"Oh, women's men are only women dressed up."

"I won't hear any more," replied Effie, running to the pianoforte, and beginning to play a polka, "Gerald, you are incorrigible!"

"Oh stop that horrid row, will you?"

"No, I can't—I say, Constance!"

"Well!" returned her sister, without taking her eyes off the book.

"Wouldn't this be a nice polka to dance to?"

"Oh bother your polkas," cried Gerald, putting his hands to his ears in his turn—"here, Constance, don't forget my glove—I can't stand this, so I shall cut"—and away he rushed.

"Well, don't you think so, Constance," said Effie again, after she had waited a reasonable time for an answer.

"What did you say?"

"Are you deaf? Wouldn't this polka be good to dance to?"

"I really don't know—I didn't pay much attention to it."

"Tiresome! listen now then, can't you?"

Constance complied, with one eye on the book however, so by the time Effie's polka was finished, with a grand crash, she was not more adequate to give an opinion than before.

"Well if that isn't too bad," exclaimed Effie in an injured tone, "I declare I don't believe you attended one bit."

"Oh yes, it is very pretty."

"Do you know what I want Papa to let us do?"

"What?"

"Why, have a little dance here some day, that polka is so sweet; my feet itch to be dancing to it."

"Oh," replied Constance, and returned to the study of Wallenstein.

"Now, Constance, do listen."

"What is it now," and she looked up again from her book with an impatient glance.

"Wouldn't it be good fun?"

"Yes."

"Why you don't seem as if you cared about it! I declare I think you are thinking only of Max all the time."

"Won't it do to discuss it another time?—there's Thekla."

"Oh, you and your Thekla!—read, read, you do nothing but read—eh! where are you off to now?"

"I'm going to finish this out in the garden, I can't here, while you talk," replied Constance, as she left the room.

"Well if that isn't kind!" said Effie to herself, as she returned to the pianoforte in high displeasure, "she can attend to everything but her own sisters; she'll sit there, pore, pore, over Max and Thekla, while I may talk my very lungs away, and she won't think it worth while to listen a jot. Of course she's very good and all that,—goes to church, and teaches schools,—but all I can

say is, her goodness makes her thoroughly disagreeable."

"I say, Constance, where are my gloves?" said Gerald, meeting his sister, just as she had got to the garden door with her bonnet on.

"Oh Gerald! I'm so sorry! I haven't done them yet."

"Just like you," was all the answer he vouchsafed.

"Oh I'll do them in a minute," she said, running after him.

"No thank you, it's too late now."

"I won't be a minute."

"No, I tell you I'm going out at once—there, go along and amuse yourself, you won't care if my fingers are all out of my gloves, not you."

In rather a disconsolate mood Constance pursued her way into the garden: "I do wish to be good, I really do," she soliloquized as she went; "but somehow I'm always

getting into trouble ; first one, and then the other—Effie's vexed, and now there's Gerald. Oh I'm very wrong. I wonder if I ought to go back, and listen to Effie—Oh but I can't, it's so silly. Ha !”

“Halloo, Constance !”

“Why, Sydney !”

“In a black study, eh? what's the matter?”

“Oh nothing—where are you going to?”

“For a constitutional walk : well, will you come?”

It was a great honour to be actually invited by Sydney to be his companion in a walk, so Constance said “Yes” at once,—though, except for the honour of the thing, she would a great deal have preferred a quiet stroll by herself, with Schiller for company.

“Taken literary this morning, eh?” said Sydney, with a glance at the book which peeped out from the cloak, where she had thought she had hid it from his satirical eyes. “What is it? Jack the Giant Killer, or Puss

in Boots? Come give it me, let's see! Oh heavens! Schiller!"

"Only Wallenstein," replied Constance, blushing at being found out.

"You little goose! what's Wallenstein but Schiller; come! I shall cross-question you: in the first place—"

"Oh please don't!"

"In the first place, who was Max, and who was Thekla?"

"Oh they—why they ought—I mean they were to have married each other," said Constance, sorely puzzled to explain their relationship.

"Oh they were, were they?" said Sydney, laughing at her roundabout way of expressing it, "and why didn't they?"

"Oh Max dies—"

"And Thekla of course, follows so good an example; what an orthodox heroine!"

"Now you are laughing, Sydney."

"I never said so."

"But your eyes do."

"And pray what possesses *you* to read Schiller?"

"And pray why shouldn't I?" returned Constance, a little indignant at the tone.

"Why, little girl, it's vexing your young brain before the time."

"I'm sure it isn't; I don't see why one shouldn't do all one can to improve one's mind."

"Oh mercy! I forgot you were by way of improvement; one of your new lights, eh?"

"A very old one you mean," she replied, her colour and her temper both rising.

"Not it. A century or two back our grandmothers were content with patching their faces, and powdering their hair."

"I pity them."

"Now do you?"

"Yes, if they had nothing better to do in life; what was the use of it?"

“Ha! and what’s the use of this Schiller, and all that, eh? answer me that question, and you’ll beat all the philosophers hollow.”

What was the use of it? Oh that she could tell herself! Unconsciously, Sydney’s words fastened themselves upon a sore spot in her mind, and galled it afresh.

“I don’t know,” she replied vehemently, “I don’t see the use of anything!”—She turned away, and felt as if she could have cried.

Sydney looked surprised, then gave a whistle, and said in a would-be sarcastic tone that hid a world of bitterness beneath it—“You’re about right, I take it! Oh this world, this precious world, it’s all hollow, hollow—hollow as a dream!”

Then, as Constance looked up half frightened at his vehemence, he muttered “Pooh, I’m a fool! here, child, come along, don’t worry your head about the use of things, because I can tell you you’ll never have done

if you don't take the world as it goes, and ask no questions,—that's the way to get on."

"But I must ; I can't help asking questions, I like to understand the 'whys' of things."

"Ask away, but who'll you get to answer you, that's all?"

"Oh I wish, I wish—"

"Well, what?"

"Oh nothing ; only if somebody could only tell me about things."

"You may wish then,—if you don't object to wishing all your life."

"But everybody doesn't seem to mind."

"Mind ! what?"

"Oh I don't know—only lots of people go on and on, and don't want any more."

"No use in wanting, that I see."

"But they don't want to want ! they're quite happy."

"And a very good thing too, I should say."

"You don't understand ;—their eating and drinking, and playing about seems quite to satisfy them."

"Does it?"

"Oh Sydney, you are so tiresome."

"I am very sorry."

"Well, it's no use talking to you," said Constance, turning away.

"Come, come, don't be absurd, child; what do you want to bother your brains so for?"

"Oh because I can't understand things, and they worry me, that's all!"

"What things?"

"I don't know; only I'm tired of living here, day after day so—I should like to do something."

"Storm a town, eh?"

"Nonsense! Ah, (as a turn in the road brought them in sight of an all but complete edifice) there's Mr. Welbeck's church, look, Sydney."

“Why if it isn’t finished, all but!—come along, and let us go and have a look at the inside.”

“Haven’t you seen it?”

“Not I! here, take care of that ditch, and don’t take that in your energy; this way.”

They were soon at the church, by traversing a bye path through a dirty field.

A strange contrast they were, she and her brother.

Constance’s eyes as she lifted them to the straight tall spire, grew earnest and dreamy in expression. While Sydney stood there, his hands in his pockets, his careless glance of curiosity taking in at one look the general outline and the many details of the whole, yet arrested and fixed by none of them.

“Come along,” at last he said, “come inside, and let us see what is to be seen there.”

They entered.—How quiet and beautiful it all seemed! Through the dim mysterious

aisles floated peacefully the calm atmosphere of prayer, while a flood of glory poured through the deep-stained window, its brilliancy tempered, and its wandering rays concentrated, into one intense path of light that fell distinctly on the pavement, in the fixity and quiet depths of its brightness.

"Beautiful, is it not?" whispered Constance to her brother.

"Beautiful? Oh yes! Why, the architecture is fair enough—too great a mixture of styles though; those pillars look as fit to support the roof as I do; and that painted window—atrocious!"

He strode across the pavement, and stood in the chancel.

"Dreadful! a mere medley of colour—looks as if an ocean of paint had been turned over it by mistake."

So he went on, criticising the subject, pointing out skilfully enough its faults and its merits, descanting on the breadth of tones

and harmonies of colours, want of unity, &c. till Constance thought he must really have forgotten where he was and of what he was speaking. She had yet to learn that she had fallen on an age when religion is the fashion, consequently the favourite topic of conversation in our drawing rooms and ball rooms. It is just as common in these days for your partner in a quadrille to ask your opinion of High Church or Low Church, the old lights and the new ones, as it used to be fifty years back as to what you thought of the last opera, Signor this, or the Prima Donna that. The Church or the Royal Academy, the observance of Saints' days or the observance of the last new animal wonder at the Zoological Gardens, it does not matter which, if it be the topic of the day, talked about it must be, and talked about it is. Truly this is a talking, perhaps too a feeling age; whether it be also an acting one, God only knows, and the future only will decide.

“It is a picture of the Crucifixion,” at last said Constance.

The words were commonplace, but the tone was low and awe-struck; it stopped Sydney, and though he only replied with a “Well!” yet he moved away, and left the phrase unfinished. The irreverence of the man and the scholar stood rebuked before the meek faith of the girl of eighteen.

But the heart of Constance was heavy. The young plant of a still feeble faith hung drooping, for the withering breath of unloving scepticism had passed over it, and the fair petals of its bright flowers closed themselves up beneath its influence. She allowed her brother to leave the church without her, saying she could go home alone. When he was gone she sat down on one of the benches, her forehead resting on her hands. All seemed changed, the church, everything; her soul that a moment before, strong in the energy of undoubting trust, had rejoiced in the

thought of prayer and holiness, now felt chilled and dim, like the landscape from which the sun has recalled its rays, leaving it to the dark skirting of the thunder-cloud. Rising up suddenly she left the church, and to get rid of the indefinite feeling of oppression settling down upon her, began walking rapidly homewards. She gained the grounds, and then stopping to take breath, leant against a tree, and thought sadly of her brother. Almost she could have repined that she had not more influence over others. Why was it, that she felt but as a cipher in the world? and yet it is said only, "Work out thine own salvation," not "Work out the salvation of others." Duty is ours, consequences are God's; let us do the first, God will take care of the last.

"Not there, Martin, please; a little more in the sunshine; there—thank you. Oh! it is so nice. What a beautiful day. Isn't it

good of God to make such a beautiful day?"

These words were spoken by a little, pale, gentle-faced boy, who was being drawn in a little chaise, propped up by pillows. At the sound of the flute-like little voice Constance turned round, and seeing her little brother Basil, went up to him.

"Ah, sister Conny, is it you?" said the child, a bright look passing over his face, "there now, Basil is very happy. May I stay with you just a wee, wee bit, in this glory sunshine?"

"Yes, darling, certainly."

"Ah, there now," said the child, "isn't God good to me! God loves Basil, and He makes you love Basil; Oh, how happy Basil is!"

"Are you so very happy, then?" said Constance, with a wistful look.

"Oh yes, so very! bright sunshine in and bright sunshine out."

Constance involuntarily glanced at the crippled little form beside her, then listened to the strong pulse of health beating through her every vein ; and as the thought arose, "He has little in this world, I, in comparison, everything, and yet—" she turned away, for her tears were flowing.

"Sister Conny," said the little voice again, "isn't the world very beautiful, and isn't it good of God to make it so?"

Constance had not thought about it before, but she wished she had, so she said—

"Yes, very good indeed."

"But you don't speak natural," said the child, trying to turn round to look at her. "There's tears in your voice. Oh, Conny, I don't understand why, with God to love them, everybody isn't happy."

She did not reply at once, and when she did, it was not an answer, but a question she put.

"You were never unhappy, then, darling?"

"Oh yes ; I was once very unhappy, but I am not unhappy about that now."

"Tell me."

"Oh, it was a year ago ; you remember when I went with Mamma to some place, I don't know where, a great way."

"Oh I know, Kreutznach."

"Yes ; the doctors said they were to make me walk—the baths I mean ; but they didn't. You knew Karl?"

"The little German boy who was at the same hotel, you mean. Yes ; well, what became of him?"

The tears came into Basil's eyes, and a bright look suddenly dawned on his face.

"God took him, sister Conny."

"Died, do you mean? Oh, that must have made you sad indeed!"

"Sad, no ; how could it!" and a look of bewilderment passed over his face.

Constance did not reply for a moment ; then she said—

"But I thought you said you were unhappy."

"So I was; I was naughty, that is why—" and a tear trembled on his pretty eyelids, "I was vexed: Oh sister Conny, wasn't I bad?"

"Vexed! about what?"

"Because Karl went home, and because God did not take me too;" and a little half sob choked his utterance. "There! I am not crying for Karl, only, only," said the child, looking up to his sister's face, "I do so want to go too; do you think God will make me wait much longer?"

His sister's voice trembled as she said,

"My darling, I cannot tell, you must wait His time."

"Then I'll try and not wish to go, till God wishes it too. Only it isn't wrong is it, to say, 'Thank God for taking Karl home; please God, take Basil home too, when it is time.'"

"Master Basil," said the servant, coming forward, "it is time for you to go home, if you please, sir."

"Very well, Martin, I'm ready," answered the child at once.

"Would you not rather stay a little bit longer?" said Constance, as she marked his wistful glance thrown towards the spot, as Martin having wrapped him up, began drawing the chair away.

"I think I should have liked it."

"Then why don't you? Stop, Martin!"

"No, no, please sister Conny."

"Why not?"

"Because I think—I am sure—I ought to go home."

"Why *ought*?"

"Because Martin says so."

"But that does not make it right because Martin says so."

"Oh yes it does; because Martin must know better about things than I do."

Constance did not answer, but walked beside him in silence ; her heart was busy working out a problem for herself, of which the text was Basil.

“ Oh, what simple faith !” she thought to herself : “ this child is contented to do whatever he is told, without asking any questions, because he is sure that the person who tells him knows more than he himself does. What a lesson this might be to others—to *others*, and why not to *me* ? Here have I been repining because I feel such a mere cipher in the world. Yet it is God’s will I should be *where* I am and *what* I am, and must He not know much better than I do ? Yes, Oh yes. Then is it not worse than folly not to submit to His weaving the web of my life, rather than try to weave it myself ? Yes, yes ; I will try if I can.”

“ Sister Conny, please pick me that pretty, pretty flower.”

“ It is not a flower, dear, it is a weed.”

“What is a weed?”

“Why, a thing that is of no use.”

“Of no use,” said Basil, looking very thoughtful, “how can that be? I don’t understand. I thought God never made anything without its being wanted somehow.”

Unknown to himself Basil was a philosopher. In children and childlike minds faith often takes the place and does the work of reason; does it, too, more quickly and effectually than reason could do for itself; and unconsciously Basil had struck a chord in his sister’s mind that was from henceforth to vibrate on for ever, and not die down again into silence.

“I am not coming in just yet, Basil,” said Constance, as they approached the house, “if Mamma asks for me, will you say I am gone for a walk;” and turning down the gravel path, she pursued to herself the train of thought her brother’s words had broken.

“The will of God,” she thought to her-

self, as she went along the road, tying and untying her bonnet strings, "but it is so hard sometimes. Now, if the will of God meant some great thing for me to do, some act really worth doing ! think," she went on considering to herself, "think of the wondrous deeds that men, aye, and frail women too, have done. Ah ! it would be worth living for, to be a St. Theresa, a Madame de Chantal, or a Mrs. Fry ;" her cheek flushed, her eye kindled, and her heart burnt within her ; "but is it worth—" her cheek paled, the eye dimmed, and the heart grew heavy with unshed tears, "is it worth living to be nothing but Constance Conyngham ?"

A voice seemed to answer within her—

"Yes ; it is worth living to be a Christian."

She paused in her walk and stood still.

"Yes, yes," she exclaimed, half aloud, "it is worth while living to be a Christian. Only I should like my life to be life in earnest. I

could not bear it should be all spent on crochet and songs."

Poor Constance ! her zeal against crochet and songs was very intense ; but was it unjustly so ? Are not the lives of nine out of ten of our young ladies spent on scarcely greater objects than these ? A hundred years hence, what will it all profit them ? Yet it was the very sense of dissatisfaction and weariness which attended the empty husks of knowledge, on which Constance's hungry soul was made to feed, and the unvarying monotony of the daily life in which her chafing spirit was made to move, that was leading her to better things, by obliging her to seek for some higher aim, some holier object for her heart and mind, out of herself and beyond herself. God generally chooses the weakest means to fulfil His greatest ends. Man, seeing but the former, mocks at the possibility of the latter, forgetting that after all, there is no such thing in Na-

ture as an isolated act or an isolated being. Creation is the circle of which God is the centre; an innumerable number of links forms that circle: break one link, the chain breaks too; consequently the tiniest link is as important as the greatest, for the one is as necessary to the upholding of the chain as the other. Beware we then how we call our life useless, or our position insignificant. Is that life useless which helps to support the circle of existence? Is that position insignificant that serves to sustain that circle whose centre is God—therefore every where; and whose circumference is eternity—therefore nowhere?

CHAPTER II.

“Be sure that God
Ne’er dooms to waste the strength He gave.
Ask the gier-eagle why she stoops at once
Into the vast, and unexplored abyss?
What full-grown pow’r informs her from the first
Why she not marvels, strenuously beating
The silent, boundless regions of the sky?
Be sure they sleep not, whom God needs.”

Browning.

“To-day is a king in disguise. To-day always looks
mean to the thoughtless, yet all good and great actions
are made up precisely of those blanks—to-day.”

Emerson.

CONSTANCE pursued her walk till she came
to the top of the hill overlooking the village,
near which her own home was situated.
There she stood still, and thought again: a

hand laid on her shoulder made her look up:—

“Ah! Mr. Barnard.”

“Well, my dear child, what are you busy-ing those poor little brains of yours about?”

The speaker was an old man, a great friend of the family, who lived near them, and was particularly fond of Constance. He and his sister dwelt together in a little cottage on the outskirts of the village. The sister lived but to worship her brother; and the brother lived but to worship God. As Sydney Conyngham used to say of her, “She looked upon her brother as a conjunction of Solon of Athens, and the Apollo Belvidere, crowned by a St. Paul.” Guileless, simple in the extreme, his whole soul was given first to God, and then to Nature, because in Nature he discerned that Nature’s God, and looking up through the one to the other, he loved the one because of the other, and rejoiced in both. He delighted in flowers and chil-

dren, because in the misty simplicity of old age, he looked upon children as flowers, and the flowers were to him as his own children. His thoughts often flowed into poetry, and his words often followed in their track.

He sat down on a bench at hand, overlooking the village, and drew Constance to his side. A strange contrast they were! The young girl, and the old man, both standing at the extreme ends of life. The one, as she leant against a laburnum tree, impatiently pulled the budding leaves to pieces, while loosened by the wind, wayward locks of chesnut hair strayed unheeded over a face that no way remarkable for beauty, either of form or feature, was yet one of those clear countenances that take every impression, whether of sunshine or shadow, cast upon them, either from within or without. At that moment, the eager look, and dark kindling eye, marked her out at once as one of those spirits who chafe for the battle of

life, because that battle has not yet begun; and who long to go forth into the world, because the world is still to them an unknown land. The other, as he sat there, with his thoughtful eye fixed upon the landscape before him, seemed to be pondering on the course of his past life. His gaze wandered over the path that led from the village church below, up to the hill whereon he sat—a type, as it appeared to him, of his own way through the world—now passing on into gloom, and then anon bursting into light. The battle of his life was now well nigh over, and the weapons of his warfare tried and proved on the hard won field of victory.

Some time he remained thus buried in thought, as though forgetful of the presence of the young girl, and when he looked up, she was kneeling by his side.

“Mr. Barnard,” she said in a quick hurried tone, “I know you will think me very impatient; I know that I am; but

have you never felt, did you never feel, I mean when you were young, the one long earnest desire for an active and vigorous life? Something great, something beyond the going to bed at night succeeding the getting up in the morning. Something, oh! something that was not all—do and begin again. I know you will call me foolish, but what is my life, what are most lives I see, women's lives I mean? They sing a few songs, work a few anti-macassars, know a little of French, drawing, and everything, and are—nonentities!"

"My dear child," said the old man looking down tenderly, almost pityingly, into the flushed eager face upraised to his, as though he was used to such outbreaks from her, and took them as a matter of course, "I do not say this is not true, but it need not be so; remember George Herbert,

"All may have, if they dare choose,
A glorious life or grave."

“Men, perhaps, but women — oh no; women must make puddings and sew on buttons all their lives.”

“And yet,” replied the old man shaking his head gently, “it is not great actions, but little ones, that make up the sum of life. She whose occupation in the world is only to sew on buttons, may do it to the glory of God, and in His sight be infinitely greater than that man who conquers a kingdom only for his own.”

“But sewing on buttons will not fill up the heart,” said Constance impetuously, for now the floodgates were opened, the whole tide of feeling burst forth.

“Did God mean it should? No; the trifles of life are ordained on purpose to force us onwards to seek for the realities of eternity. The heart was made for God, and less than God will never satisfy it. Believe me now, you probably will not, but there will come a time, mark me, there *will* come a

time when you have tried earth, and found it insufficient; tried friendship, and found it wanting; tried pleasure, and found it bitterness; tried, tried—ah! even human love, and found it to fail; and then you will acknowledge what now I have just told you, that the heart was made for God, and less than God neither can nor will satisfy it.”

The young girl looked half doubtingly—

“Of course, I know it is true what you say, but there are many pleasant sights and sounds in the world; it is a pleasant world, I feel it; pleasant to live, pleasant to *be*; pleasant, oh very! But it must be pleasanter still to have some great object in life, some grand design, to bind in one the scattered fragments of distance. You know,” she continued smiling, “as the old philosophers would have it, ‘Nature abhors a vacuum,’ I am sure the heart does.”

“Ah! there it is again, the old Eve sin, longings after the forbidden fruit—of earthly

happiness. We may have it in all its fullness, and yet——”

“And yet?——”

“And yet if this be all, if the heart have not cast out the anchor of an ardent love, on some more sure and eternal foundation, that heart will still be restless and unsatisfied; it is nourishing the branch when the root is dead; applying remedies to the members while the plague spot still lingers on the heart.”

Constance sighed.

“Perhaps; but I don't realise all that yet; I think I should be so content if I had any one great thing to do in this world, of which I could say, This, *this* is the business of life; but now I must go on and on; reading, working, drawing, learning German, Italian, and crochet; and oh! what good is it when I have done it all? I seem to be always adding and adding up an addition sum of ‘noughts,’ the result of which is always the same, that is—nothing at all.”

“ Ah ! my child, remember, that to God nothing is great, and therefore nothing can be small. Man has invented these words for the vocabulary of earth, which are not known in the language of heaven. Let those who complain of a time unoccupied, a heart unfilled, strive to spread over the relations of daughter, sister, and friend, a little of that charity, which, like snow, rests upon the rough places of the earth, veiling its sharp angles from view ; let them strive to light up a smile on the faces of the sad ; lay a whisper of hope soft upon an aching spirit ; and, oh ! believe me, while there is love in heaven, and breaking hearts upon earth, no life need be aimless, and no heart objectless.”

There was a short pause, then Constance said half hesitatingly,—

“ Perhaps, Mr. Barnard, after all, I am unfitted for any other kind of life. After all, I dare say it is the best for me.”

“Why, my dear child, of course it is, or God would not have appointed it to you.”

“Then I ought not to wish for any change in it.”

“Wish not, as you value your peace. We wish for a thing often, and when the wish is granted, we would it were unwished. Oh! he has indeed cause to fear, who uncalled and unsummoned, pushes himself into a post, perchance never intended for him. Keep yourself only at the post of obedience, dear child, and then if the word comes, ‘Go up higher,’ you will be sure the call is from God, and the word is ‘Obey.’ At present remember—

‘They also serve, who only stand and wait.’”

“Ah! if I only never forgot it; for do you know,” she went on hurriedly, “sometimes when I am wishing and wishing, and longing for some change in this life of monotonous things; when I am hoping for the

time to come when my existence will cease to be passive, and become active—people say, books say, there is so much of sorrow in the world, then I get frightened, for I cannot help feeling, that though the world to me is very bright I should like it to be brighter still; and if instead, it were all sorrow, oh! Mr. Barnard! could I bear it?" and she buried her face in her hands.

"My dear," he replied, laying his hand tenderly on her shoulder, "I cannot indeed tell what your future path may be. I know not whether God has destined you for the burning fiery furnace of affliction, or chosen you out for dwelling amid the Eden gardens of this world still left to us; but this I do know, that in some shape or other, trials infallibly will meet you, for life is synonymous with trial—I had almost said with sorrow; and how can then any one expect to be exempt; nay, how can one dare to wish it?"

"But I do not dare, I do not wish it; it is not that—I do feel, I do think I could joy in the power to do and to suffer—I could, yes I am sure I could bear, oh! a great deal, and do a great deal."

Her face kindled as she clasped her hands in all the energy of high resolve—

"But then," and her voice sank as the evening breeze dies down into silence, "but then, when I have almost longed for the smart of sorrow, rather than the rust of inaction, there comes like a warning voice down deep in my heart, that startling, and awful question, 'Could you bear it?' I know not—I fear and tremble."

"If God sent it you, you could, my child. Nothing is too hard to bear that He sends; but beware of longing to have your own will, and then when you get it, taking it to be the will of God."

"But I am leading such a useless and inactive life; I am doing nothing, because

there seems nothing for me to do—dont be angry,” she said, looking pleadingly in his face, “I can’t help feeling it—I am doing nothing.”

“But God’s will,” quietly interposed Mr Barnard.

“Yes; but still it seems like doing nothing,” she answered quickly, “there is no fruit.”

Mr. Barnard did not reply at once; when he did—“Why, my dear,” he said suddenly, pointing to a field at a little distance, “I thought you told me Farmer Johnson sowed that fine piece of land of his, three weeks ago.”

“So he did, sir,” she answered in a slightly peevish tone, vexed to have, what to her were deep thoughts, intruded upon with so trivial a question.

“But how is that? There is no fruit.”

“But remember, sir, it was but three weeks ago that it was sown.”

“I do remember it, my dear child,” he replied, turning towards her tenderly; “and remember also, it is only eighteen years ago that you came into the world; only a little more than eighteen years, and you were not! How then is it, that Farmer Johnson is content to wait for his harvest, till the seed be fully grown, while you are so impatient, that scarce is the seed sown before you want to reap it, and then because you see nought, cry out, ‘there is no fruit?’ Is there not a season for sowing, and a season for reaping in the world of nature? why then not the same in the garden world of the heart? Who expects to sow and reap at the same time? Youth is life in embryo, it is life’s seed time. Shall we repine because it is not its harvest time? The harvest will come, but not till the seed time is past; the fruit will ripen, but not till the blossom has faded; and the fruit will fall, but not till the fruit is ripe.”

The young girl remained silent for some

moments, gazing intently on the blank expanse of the farmer's field. When she spoke again, her voice was hurried and hesitating—

“Yes, yes—I see; but still—I know our duty is to be content with God's will, whatever that will may be; it is very wrong, but still one—I mean I cannot help feeling it often seems like doing nothing, notwithstanding.”

“Was not this winter a very severe one?”

“Yes, sir, very,” she replied, surprised at the question.

“Yes it was, indeed. Day after day the meek snow stole noiselessly down, and laid tenderly its veil of pitying purity on the hard rude features of this outer world; day after day, and still the same white mantle rested in unvaried softness on the face of the earth. All this time, useless and inactive, what was nature doing? Doing nothing but the will of God. And the flowers, when April showers have watered them, and May

suns matured them, they robe themselves in fairness, and look radiant with loveliness; but they too are doing nothing, nothing but the will of God. That seed also which we saw sown in yonder field, not very long ago, why has it not sprung up? what is it doing? why does it not give some witness of what it means to be? Does it not know that time is passing; men have been born into the world, and men have gone out of the world; sunshine and storm, wind and rain, have come and gone, while it still remains closely hid in the earth—what has it been about all this time? Doing nothing, nothing but the will of God.”

He paused for a few moments, leaning on his stick, then went on again—

“ It is not the *quantity* but the *quality* of our obedience that God regards. He only says, ‘ Do my will ;’ the fruits and the consequences are alike in His hands. The whole life of the Christian is comprised in that one

word, 'Obey.' For to obey implicitly we must have faith; and to obey heartily, we must have love. Therefore the will of God is the one law that governs both the natural and the spiritual world. More than that, angels cannot do; less than that, man may not do."

CHAPTER III.

All are architects of fate,
Working in these walls of time;
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Nothing useless is, or low,
Each thing in its place is best ;
And what seems but idle show,
Strengthens and supports the rest.

Longfellow.

MR. BARNARD was here suddenly interrupted by the sound of "Constance ! Constance !" coming up upon the wind, and the next moment Effie's little figure itself appeared, toiling up the hill.

"Oh ! here comes Effie," exclaimed Constance in a vexed tone, as she thought that

now there was an end to the conversation,
“ what can she want ?”

If she had paid attention, she might have seen how differently Mr. Barnard received her sister—

“ Well, my dear,” he said, holding out his hand, and drawing her kindly to his side, “ what have you to say to me ?”

“ Oh, dear Mr. Barnard,” cried Effie, with twice the warmth of manner of Constance, “ I am *so* glad to see you ; only you know,” she added, with a toss of her saucy little head, “ I didn’t come to find you, I came to look for Constance.”

“ And here is Constance, so you wont have to look very far. But is it a secret, you look very mysterious ? Get along with you both and have it out together, I promise you I wont listen.”

“ Oh, sir, indeed you may, it is no secret, at least it wont be, and indeed you may hear it ; that is,” she added, looking doubt-

fully at him, "if you won't think it very silly."

"Tell me first, my dear, and then I will tell you what I think about it."

"I will give you each three guesses," said Effie, "you, Constance, guess first."

"Some trumpery, I daresay," answered Constance, not thinking it worth while to give herself the trouble of guessing.

Not so: Mr. Barnard!

"Well, my dear, has some one given you a watch or a dog, or, or—" continued he, quite at his wit's end, "a new bonnet?"

"Now, Mr. Barnard, how can you? No; but I'll tell you though. Papa says we may have an evening party—a ball—there!"

"A ball," echoed Constance, not looking particularly delighted.

"Yes, a ball: why you could not look more disconsolate if I had said an execution," exclaimed her sister with an aggrieved air; "now could she, Mr. Barnard?"

“Well, my dear, such an announcement would certainly be a little startling.”

“But, Effie, you do things in such a whirlwind always—why you talk as if everything was settled, and I have never heard a word about it before.”

“My dear, whose fault is that but your own?” returned Effie: “if people will be up to the eyes in philosophy and Schiller, of course they have no ears for the remarks of ordinary mortals. But why don’t you look a little pleased like a rational being, now you do know?” and Effie proceeded to enforce her observation with a little shake of her sister’s arm, which only met with a “Don’t!” from the latter.

“Well, I must say,” continued Effie, “it is not very kind of you, when I took all the trouble to come up this hill to tell you.”

Constance looked a little ashamed then, when she remembered how she but that very morning had sought her own pleasure to the

exclusion of Effie's, and the neglect of a duty to her brother ; and now she was doing the same thing again, only in a different way. All her good thoughts and aspirations of a moment back, were they worth nothing ?

“ Oh, but I do mean to try and be good,” she thought to herself, applying a panacea to conscience, “ but this is quite another matter ; it is very provoking to be talked to about balls and folly. I know I was wrong about Gerald's gloves—but how *am* I to be good ? oh, dear ! when every one around me will talk of nothing but trash !”

Poor Constance ! her self-knowledge was very superficial ; she did not know herself enough yet to tell why a ball to her and a ball to Effie were two very different things. Effie's pretty face and lively manner making her a general favourite, while Constance, not particularly pretty, and no adept at small talk, generally managed to fall heir to some

obscure seat in the corner, with none but middle-aged maidens and overgrown boys to keep her company; so that she usually returned home sad and disappointed, and ashamed and angry with herself for being so.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Barnard kindly, "I only hope you will enjoy yourself; that is, if that little head of yours is not quite turned by the prospect—when is it to be?"

"Oh, I don't know—not quite just yet—perhaps not for another month or two; but we have got the promise of it all safe. Won't it be fine? Shan't I enjoy inviting the people! Let me see—there are the Bowens, the Jamiesons, the Tyrells, oh, and I wish that Italian Countess that is to come to Dunscombe may be there; they say she is a genius, and I want to see a genius."

The old man smiled.

"A kind of natural curiosity you take it

to be ; an irregularity of the genus 'homo.' ”

“ Oh, sir, but you know geniuses must be unlike other people ; they ought to talk like a book and look as grave as a Solon. And then as for the gentlemen—we must invite plenty of them : you know, sir,” she added, half apologetically to Mr. Barnard, “ ladies wont—I mean can’t dance without gentlemen.”

A grave smile lurked around the corners of the old man’s mouth.

“ Assuredly not, my dear ; and what then ? ”

“ Why, I mean there will be some trouble to find a sufficient supply of them. You don’t know the Villiers, do you, sir ? ”

“ Why, my dear ? ”

“ Why I was wondering whether there were young ladies there or gentlemen. I know there is no Mrs. Villiers ; she is dead, I believe.”

“Well, my dear, for your comfort I believe there are both. But come, my child, you mustn’t let that little head of yours quite run wild. You know the old adage, ‘All play and no work makes Jack a dull boy.’ I fear dancing is not much help to sense. Run away now, little maid,” he continued, kindly patting her shoulder, “and try and think no more of parties, or partners, for the present.”

Effie was gone, having run home again, first warning Constance it was nearly luncheon time; but Constance did not pay much attention as she still stood on the same spot, trying in vain to knit up again the broken thread of thought; and failing in the effort, looking hopelessly and wearily across the distant prospect.

“Well, Constance, still upon the old tack? Not yet out of the slough of despond?”

“It is no use, sir, I never can be good,” answered Constance, while tears of vexation

filled her eyes, "such slow results follow on such great endeavours, our lives are so diminutive and our actions are so small."

"No wonder, when you begin at the wrong end of the clue of life, that you should be unable to unravel it—you, who can't spare a minute to your sister, how will you find time for all those fine aspirations of yours? Nay, I don't mean to wound you."

"Oh, sir," replied Constance, feeling very conscience-stricken as again a remembrance of Gerald's gloves came to mind, "but I cannot attend to nonsense and balls—ought I?"

"You can read Wallenstein, I see," he replied, catching sight of the book in her hand, "for your own pleasure; listen to Effie then sometimes for hers. And, my child, shew you have learnt the *significance* of small things, then and not till then, will you see the *insignificance* of what the world calls 'great things,' for the conviction that

everything is small in the sight of God shall teach you that His love has made nothing so."

Constance stood deep in thought for some minutes ; then she said hurriedly—

"Yes, yes ; but there are some things, necessary things, so determinedly earthly—I mean," she said, blushing, "for instance, what a large space of life is covered over with breakfast and dinner, and another large space with going to bed and getting up again ; one half of our lives is spent in dreaming with our eyes closed, and the other half in dreaming with them open, and then—"

"And then all we have to do is, to exalt these necessary things into holiness."

"I don't see—how?"

"By trying to make each act of daily life a step in that golden ladder of holy deeds, which links earth to heaven, and binds them both in one."

"Yes, if one could ; only one is apt to fancy it profanation to link in the thought of

God with the thought of our own pleasures and occupations."

" 'Whatsoever ye do, do all in the name of the Lord,' " said Mr. Barnard solemnly; "it is not said, When ye do this or that thing, when ye enter upon a new course of action, or come upon one of those epochs in life which are datas in thy existence — but '*Whatsoever* ye do,' be it great or small, be it to rule an empire or to cut bread and butter: '*whatsoever* ye do,'—that is, *everything* ye do, 'do *all* in the name of the Lord.' "

Constance did not answer immediately; then looking up, gave a long gasp, as if a great weight had suddenly been removed from her heart.

"I see," she exclaimed, almost joyfully, as her countenance brightened, and a happy radiance settled over her brow and stole into her eyes, "I see! yes, even a life like mine, with no great events in it, made up of little

acts at home, may be lived to the glory of God."

"Most surely! I have often thought, if it be not given that our life should be glorious as the sun, when he shineth forth in his strength; at least this may be given, that it should be as the little sunbeam, that here and there lights up a spot that otherwise would have been desolate; and now and then throws wandering gleams of beauty over the rugged peaks and barren places of this world. And oh! if to us it is granted to shed but a little sunlight on the path of one other, soothe but one sorrow, or lay but a whisper of peace soft on one aching heart, who shall say that our lives are useless, or our work not glorious? Like the sunbeam our mission is fulfilled; for we have bestowed that one cup of cold water which, 'Verily I say unto you, shall not lose its reward.'"

The glow on his cheek had deepened, and there was the glory of a great light in his

eye, while Constance hid her face in her hands, and cried quietly. The waters of life seemed to lay as in a vision before her, radiant with light, and that light was the light of Love. Her whole soul yearned with an inexpressible feeling of Divine sympathy, and her tears flowed on till they deepened into prayer, and prayer grew into praise, and from praise a feeling of intense peace and intenser happiness came down and settled and brooded over the stilled waves of her young heart, till, as in a mirror, the calm bosom of the hushed lake reflected untroubled the deep unchanging hue of heaven.

The striking of the church clock warned her at last, it was one o'clock and luncheon time, but her heart was too full to speak; so she went up to Mr. Barnard, and silently put her hand into his to wish him good bye. He detained it, and looked up into that face, over which gleaming lights and flitting sha-

dows chased one another, and as he gazed his thoughts wandered on to the future of that young girl's life. Hers was not a common face, would hers be a common lot? The eyelashes that rested on that changeful cheek gave an almost unearthly shadow to it. Why was it, to him they already seemed heavy with the weight of tears? The child-like brow, with its braids of dark hair, why was it that to him on it already rested the shadow of a coming sorrow, that the future would fling upon the disc of that young life? The quivering lips, why was it that to him they already seemed approaching that cup whose draught should be fire to the lips that drank it—tremblings of soul and bitterness of spirit through the dreary gift of years? And as she stood there, dim visions, vague fears and sad forebodings rose and moaned like the swelling of ocean through the deep of the old man's heart, till they died away on the misty shore of the

future into the low murmur of an inarticulate sigh.

Constance's voice recalled him to himself.

"Good bye, dear sir, I hope—Oh, I hope I shan't forget what you have said."

He passed his hand over his eyes, as if to sweep away a mist that had gathered there, then answered in his usual tone—

"God has given you many gifts, and remember, my dear child, you must use them. If it be presumption to seek for responsibility, it is cowardice to shrink from it. The former is a fool, but the latter is a traitor. Good bye, God bless you."

Constance Conyngham was the second daughter of a gentleman whose estate, Balcombe, though not of great extent and much encumbered, yet from its having been the inheritance of his family for many generations, gave him a certain position in the county. His family consisted of himself, his wife, four sons, and three daughters.

The eldest son, Sydney, in the —th regi-

ment, though then at home on leave, about four and twenty, was endowed with a noble face, and a naturally noble mind ; but the sneer of sarcasm as often defaced the one, as the presence of conceit continually debased the other. Well thought of, and well spoken of, he was one of those characters which, built on a foundation of sand, yet manage to erect themselves up into a striking and a gorgeous edifice, which dazzles the eyes of all beholders with the appearance of beauty, and the semblance of truth. Katharine, the eldest daughter, was a year or so younger. The correct outline of her features, and the straightness with which her black hair was braided back in cold unwavy lines from her forehead, not inaptly typified the straight lines and well squared blocks of her character. Archibald was the second son. His character had none of those prominent features which give individuality ; none of those sharp angles and pointed corners which rub against other people's prejudices ; rather,

his was one of those most tormenting of all characters; where the good and the evil are so blended, that we know not which to set on the right hand and which on the left. Then came Constance: she was eighteen, and generally considered a plain shy girl beside her elder and her younger sister. Yet those who gazed attentively on her face, often felt that a misty expression rested on it, which suggested the idea of something beyond; for, as through a dim veil, vague hints, and faint surmisings, would struggle out fitfully, like a beam of light from a cloud, to give strong indications of the capabilities of that yet undeveloped mind, and yet unwithered life; but God had placed her in a quiet home, hedged her in with the fence of a calm uneventful existence, while she, poor foolish child, fretted against both. Foolish, indeed! had the earth not been "without form, and void," when the Spirit of God "moved upon the face of the waters," it had not been so quickly called out of darkness.

into light. So also it is the blank sheet that takes the impression best, and it is on the unwritten page of a virgin mind that the finger of God traces most forcibly those characters, which, when once traced, neither life, nor death, nor time, nor eternity can blot out again for evermore. The sleep of winter precedes the full flush and glory of the summer, and beneath the chrysalis shroud is hid the germ of a future beauty and the commencement seed of a great glory. Euphemia, a year younger than Constance, was gifted with one of those bright faces and bright minds, that throw off trouble like summer rain, and seem made to ride lightly over the billows of life. The third son, Gerald, was in the embryo state wherein that transformation is being effected which converts that universally condemned natural production called a "boy," into the polished elegant specimen of humanity, which adorns our drawing rooms, and figures in our ball rooms. He was in the first half of his

career at Harrow, and the most prominent feature in his character at present was his venom against every other school, and Eton in particular. The youngest, Basil, was six years old. From his birth he had been a cripple. Day after day he would sit quietly in his little chair, wrapped up in his own thoughts, while every now and then a peculiar light would flit across his face, as if he held converse with the Eternal and Unseen. The veil that mortality has hung up between the Finite and the Infinite, for him had no existence, so palpably did he seem to walk on the horizon of another world. His eyes were dimmed to the visible, only to open with greater clearness on the invisible; and those who watched the changeful colour, fair complexion, and spiritual light that brightened on his brow, could not but expect to see this stray child of Heaven caught back again to his celestial home, to bloom for ever a fair flower in the Paradise of God.

CHAPTER IV.

Thou cam'st not to thy place by accident.
It is the very place God meant for thee.
And should'st thou there, small scope for action see,
Do not for this give room to discontent;
Nor let the time thou ow'st to God, be spent
In idly dreaming how thou mightest be,
In what concerns thy spiritual life, more free
From outward hindrance or impediment;
For presently this hindrance thou shalt view,
That, without which, all goodness were a task
So slight, that virtue never could grow strong.

Trench.

“HA! there's eight o'clock—come! I must make haste—oh! but it isn't pleasant work!” and with a tremendous yawn, Constance Conyngham pursued her toilet, the next morning after her conversation with Mr.

Barnard. "How the birds do sing—ah! and there's that blackbird in the mulberry tree; why, I can quite see him as I stand here, how busy he is building his nest. Every body has something to do but me. I wish I were a bird to make nests—no, I don't though, because then I couldn't read Schiller or things—why, what a goose I am!"—and with that conclusive assertion, Constance began brushing her hair; here she came to a pause, and began soliloquizing again: "I declare it makes one quite envious to see everything so bright and busy out of doors; I wish I could find something to do, besides playing those old polkas! How I hate the name of them! and reading that tiresome 'Quarterly.'—Oh! I've got a bright idea—it has just struck me. I'll do it, yes I will—why shouldn't I? Aunt Elmhurst speaks in her last letter of the good cousin Fanny is doing, attending the schools, and visiting the poor. Why, I

might do that, then I really should be of some good in the world ! now I feel only a piece of lumber ; I wonder I never thought of it before ; I'll do it, I declare I will ! this very day, too. I'm sure Mr. Barnard will think then that I am profiting by what he said yesterday. Let me see—oh ! I must be quick, there isn't much time,"—and she began to dress in good earnest, and was in the breakfast room half an hour before any one else.

"Why, Constance !" said Gerald, as they all sat at breakfast, "what's the row with you, you seem in a desperate hurry?"

"So I am," said Constance.

"Pooh ! why?"

"Oh ! I don't know, only I am going to be busy this morning."

"How absurd !" said Katharine, "really Constance, from the way you talk, one would fancy you had a hundred things to settle and arrange."

"Women's tongues into the bargain," said Archie silyly.

"But," answered Constance quickly, "I really have this morning a great deal to do."

"A great deal to do!" said Sydney with a laugh. "What!—you call torturing the pianoforte one half of the day, perpetrating crochet the other half, a great deal to do, I suppose?" An ironical smile curled his lips, which changed into a look of weariness, as he pushed away his plate, and strode moodily towards the window. A murmur of indignation from the petticoat side of the question, followed as a matter of course—

"That is too bad," exclaimed Euphemia.

"Very well, disprove it then," said Sydney looking round, "I defy any young lady within twenty miles to do it."

"There, young ladies, there's a challenge for you," cried Archie with a serio-comic air—"Constance, you look pugnacious, come, fight it out."

"Thank you."

"Well, begin, Sydney is ready, prepared for anything, from a box on the ear to a pistol shot."

"Nonsense, Archie, only——"

"Only what?"

"I think Sydney is wrong."

"Agreed—but the proofs."

"Why, I am sure my time is not always spent in playing tunes and doing crochet; I have other employments, I assure you."

"Have you?" said Sydney ironically; "pray favour us with them."

A flush of angry annoyance rose to Constance's cheek.

"No, indeed," she exclaimed; "I am going first to the school, then to see the poor people, and after that I must study my German and Italian, read English history and French, draw, write extracts, and then——"

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Archie, putting both hands to his ears with a comic expression

of dismay, "do you want to deafen us with learning? No homœopathic doses yours. One half of that will make a confirmed blue."

"And the whole of it would not make more," replied Sydney sarcastically. "You must have forgotten half the catalogue, Constance! Why, there are the missing books of Livy you are reading, besides the Essay on the unknown situations of the towns in the moon, fired on—by Sennacherib, and that on the undiscovered secret of perpetual motion found out by Cicero, all to be reflected upon this blessed day, before conscience will allow the concentrated wisdom of your brain to find a temporary repose in sleep."

A general laugh was raised at Constance's expense, whose face crimsoned over with a sense that it was not totally unmerited, while Mr. Conyngham said—

"Poor people! what do you mean about the poor, Constance?"

"It is not your business," suggested Gerald, suddenly wheeling up to the scene of encounter.

"Aunt Elmhurst says she always goes to visit the poor at Oaklands," replied Constance, half hesitatingly, "and I do not see why I may not do the same at home."

"Don't you? Well, I do," replied her father, a cloud gathering over his brow. "Once for all, Constance, I will have no new-fangled Oakland notions here; girls of your age had better stay at home, and mind their books, and mend their stockings. The poor! indeed!—I won't have any new lights here, so I can tell you."

"And what is all this too about the school?" interrupted his wife; "what school? what is it you mean? what has come over the child?"

"Why—why, mamma," replied Constance, "cousin Fanny always goes to the school to teach a class there, you know."

But Mrs. Conyngham did not know ; all she knew was (and in this her other two daughters perfectly concurred), that it was a most improper place for any young lady calling herself her child to go to. She could not think how Aunt Elmhurst could allow Fanny to do it—besides, certainly there might be schools somewhere about the village, but she did not remember to have heard about them.

“Teaching half a dozen dirty children their A B C,” said Katherine shortly ; “a very pretty occupation indeed for a young lady !”

“I dont see how it can be a very unfit one,” said Constance firing up ; “Aunt Fanny said—I mean—I thought every one ought to do it.”

“Then you thought wrong,” replied Katherine, as she got up from her seat, and drawing a large work-frame towards her,

began sorting out her wools. Constance stood a few moments irresolutely.

"But I must go," at last she said, "I want to be useful, I can't spend my time any longer doing nothing;" and her eyes fell almost contemptuously on the elaborate bunch of flowers her sister was endeavouring to transfer to the canvass. Katherine saw the look, and replied coldly;

"Be more circumspect in your phrases pray, Constance, and do not call that 'nothing' which would probably take you your whole life to accomplish."

"Very likely; and that is just the reason why I don't want to pass my days so—spending one's life on such a thing as that, what a waste of time!"

"Hang your time, and you too!" exclaimed Gerald; and Euphemia looked up with an expression of annoyance. She wished Constance would be quiet, really they had heard enough about herself and her "time,"

for that day, she quite gave her a headache with it.

Constance was gone in a moment, and throwing rather than putting on her bonnet, was just going into the garden, when she was followed and stopped by Archie and Gerald—

“Heyday, Constance, going out?” said the latter, “come along with me then like a sensible girl, I am going to have such a famous ride.”

“I can’t now, Gerald—just now indeed I can’t.”

“What!” exclaimed Archie, “still bent on the useful—well, you are an odd girl, to give up a glorious canter for the sake of teaching a dozen of unteachable brats that D O G ought to spell ‘dog,’ and R O D used to spell ‘rod,’ when you last learnt your letters—faith! that’s the only thing worth teaching them. Example is better than precept—give them a practical illustration of the last

word, and trust me, they won't forget it in a hurry !”

“ But,” interrupted Gerald, “ do come, Constance ; upon my word I'm not joking ; it is such a bore riding alone.”

“ A complimentary reason,” said Archie, as he walked away whistling.

“ Indeed, Gerald, I can't come now,” replied Constance shortly ; and Gerald, turning sharp on his heel, left her, and went away. The rest of the day was an uncomfortable one for Constance. Divided between doubts as to what she ought to do, and what she ought not to do, the disagreeable consciousness remained of having been cross and uncomplying to her brother, and felt rebellious towards her parents. Gerald too had not been seen since the morning. It was in no very happy frame of mind that Constance descended to the drawing room dressed for dinner. Her hand was on the handle of the door, when she heard voices, as if in angry

altercation within. Her first impulse was to go back—her second to go in—and as she opened the door, the latter was the only alternative. Mr. Conyngham was standing in the middle of the room, talking with angry brow and angry words to Gerald, who stood half leaning against the mantel-piece, with a look of would-be bravado on his face; one of his arms in a sling, the other attempting to play carelessly with the fire-irons. At a little distance sat Mrs. Conyngham on the sofa, looking nervous and anxious, every now and then trying to pacify her husband with,

“Never mind, my dear, he did not mean it; he won’t do it again. Will you, Gerald?”

“Didn’t mean it,” cried Mr. Conyngham; “didn’t mean it, indeed! There, dont tell me, (as his wife stammered out something about “Boys will be boys,”) dont tell me. I downright forbade that boy,” pointing to Gerald, “to go out hunting this morning;

and that boy, in the very teeth of my prohibition, chose downright to go and do it. I should not have known anything of it, but for that scratch on his arm. He may think himself lucky that with that tumble of his he escaped with his neck unbroken; let me catch him doing anything of that kind again, and I can tell him it won't be so pleasant for him:" and out walked Mr. Conyngham, slamming the door after him.

No one spoke for a few moments, till Mrs. Conyngham said, in a deprecating tone—

"Gerald dear, what a pity to go and make your father so angry; what put it into your head, my love, to do it?"

"Why," Gerald burst forth with, like a whirlwind, "I must go somewhere. It is not so pleasant to stay at home all day, poking about all by myself, I assure you."

"But you had your brothers and sisters to go out with you, my dear," said his mother soothingly.

“Not a bit of it! Sydney was at his books, and Archie off at something else. My sisters indeed! Katherine can do nothing but mope all day over her fancy work; Effie squall the very cats out of countenance; and as to Constance, it would be quite a profanation with her waste of time and good deeds to do such a common-place thing as to come out with me. I’m not half dirty enough to hit her fancy! If I had no shoes on my feet, or coat to my back, then indeed I might hope to share her attention, but—”

“Oh, Gerald,” interrupted Constance.

“Oh, Gerald; don’t ‘oh, Gerald’ me; deny it if you can, that’s all I say: didn’t I ask you to go out with me this morning, and didn’t you refuse? So ’tis all your fault, this pretty mess I have got into! If you had only just come with me, I should as soon have thought of hunting as of going to the moon! I had nothing to do; and I happened to be near when the hunt passed, so I followed on

Roger, and that is the long and short of it."

Only too true ! There stood Constance convicted ; a cause of her brother's disobedience in part ; but dinner was announced, and her distress had to remain known only to herself. The dinner was a very dull affair, not by any means an unusual occurrence however, in a house where few of its members recognised the duty of exerting themselves for the rest ; added to which, Mr. Conyngham and Gerald were woefully out of humour. Constance looked all round the room with a kind of feeling of despair, and a vague hope that some providential dispensation would suggest some topic of conversation that would break the spell of silence, at last, with a sense of desperation, she ventured herself to hazard the remark of—

"What a very fine day this has been :"
but the announcement was received in solemn

silence, for every one knew it, and no one cared to be told they did.

Another pause. Then after a protracted gaze out of the window, she once more favoured the world with the result of her meditations.

“How the days do lengthen!”

“Now how did you find out that curious and remarkable fact?” said Sydney, with a little twitching about the corners of his mouth. “Your ideas are quite original, Constance. I congratulate you on your discovery.”

Poor Constance! that day that she had meant to do so well in, at least was a failure! How heavy her heart felt when they all returned to the drawing-room after dinner! A sense of uncongeniality, a weariness, an emptiness of spirit, a sense of the family parts not fitting well into each other, came over her. She could not say *what* jarred, but she felt something did jar in the constitution of the family. To escape the talk of

silly nothings, she walked up to the deep oriel window, and looked out. How pure, how holy it all looked ! The shades of evening had deepened into twilight ; for the mantle of darkness had fallen from the shoulders of night upon the face of the earth, to hide it for a few hours from the glare of day, and still it a little while from the ceaseless whirling of the wheel of human life. What could tell more of heaven ? She stood and gazed, and felt that all that outward world was prayer : then she turned to look upon her inward world. Her mother was sitting half dozing in a corner of the sofa over her knitting, every now and then raising her head to lament over the stitches she had dropped or the awkwardness of her new maid.

“That provoking woman Bennett had tried her ‘moire antique’ on six times, and the sixth it would not fit ; in fact she saw

clearly it never would, and had said so from the beginning."

These remarks addressed to her eldest daughter, elicited no reply, for the young lady was engaged in a duel of words with her sister Effie, whose tones, elevated to something rather above piano, sounded anything but melodious. On one side of the fire, her father with gloomy brow and compressed lips, sat dozing in a large arm chair; opposite to him in a similar position reclined Archie, his legs stretched out on the fender to their fullest capability of extent, his arms and his hands engaged in supporting the tremendous weight of the last new novel, while he himself laboured under the pleasant little delusion that he was reading it; a delusion which probably would have remained undisputed, had not the sudden decline and fall of the book to the level of the floor revealed the insecurity of its hold on the mind of the reader.

Sydney, the only one who disdained the use of arm chairs and sofas, was immersed in his books and his thoughts; Gerald had already taken his candle, with a nod to all present, and tumbled up to his room.

Was it any wonder, then, that a feeling of sadness came over Constance, as she looked on all this! It was an indescribable feeling of disappointment, of desolation—nay, almost of misery. She leant her head against the window, and a sigh of weariness escaped her. Yet she scarcely knew why; she only felt a great void in her heart, and how to fill it she knew not.

“Is it that I have no sympathy with any one?” she thought to herself; “And if thou hadst,” said a voice within her, “would the void of thy heart be filled?”

The question that arose from the deeps of her being received no answer. Who can answer it till they have tried it—tried it, with all its sweetness and its pain, and learnt

to realise the truth of that fact which sooner or later we must acknowledge, if not in this world, then in that which is to come — that the heart was made for God, and less than God cannot satisfy it. We may try many experiments, ambition, friendship, earthly affection, to stay the cravings of our being; but though we succeed in tumbling the world into the yawning crater of our souls, its chasm will still remain unfilled, until, as in the fable of old, we throw into it that which is priceless, even the fear and the love of God? Then shall the great gulf close over, and from the satisfied void, that is a void no longer, shall arise the blessed cry of "Peace, peace," when there is great peace.

"Effie," said her father, suddenly rousing himself, "go and play that duet with Constance which I like so much."

"'Morning dew-drops,' do you mean, papa? oh! but I can't. Constance was out when I wanted to practise it; so we could

not try it over again ; and our parts don't go half well enough together yet to play it."

Mr. Conyngham, unless much roused, was not in the habit of displaying his feelings, so he only looked rather annoyed, and turning himself round in his chair, settled himself for another doze. Ashamed and vexed at her neglect of her father's wishes, expressed two days before, Constance started up with—

"Shall we practise it now?"

"Thank you very much, Constance," said Sydney, looking up from his book, "your consideration for our ears is really extreme."

"Dear me!" thought Constance, as she sat down again, "what mistakes I do make! How dreadfully stupid of me to propose practising it now! of course, no one would like it. I wonder whether every one is so stupid."

Bed time came at last; and night closed upon the day.

Oh, ye sins of omission, how great will be your catalogue at the Judgment day !

Oh vain, worthless must that life be—vain as the empty bubble when it breaketh, worthless as the chaff “which the wind scattereth away from the face of the earth ;” wherein in the doing of those things which we ought to have done, we have left undone that which we ought *not* to have left undone. Though others’ wills and desires compel us to a different mode of life to what we might ourselves have chosen, God has placed us there, and a life that is given and a post that is appointed by Him can no more be aimless, and shall no more be useless, than the tiniest link in the chain of Nature, wherein “Power ordained nothing which Wisdom saw not needful.” Every one has a work to do, every one a mission to fulfil ; a work which none can do, a mission which none can fulfil but himself. Each has some darling wish, some predominant bias to their

minds. Constance's was a great longing for action, a desire after the activity of service, rather than the passive sitting down of patience. A strong will, a heart full of the superabundance of life, a keen power of enjoyment, a something of restlessness, and a superfluity of energy; who should say whether a baptism of tears and a long waiting by a cross of grief, might not be needful, before that ardent burning mind should be conformed to that condition without which, "Verily," it is said, "except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

CHAPTER V.

Not by appointment do we meet delight
Or joy : they heed not our expectancy ;
But round some corner in the streets of life
They, on a sudden, clasp us with a smile.

Gerald Massey.

The first sound in the song of love
Scarce more than silence is, and yet a sound ;
Hands of invisible spirits touch the strings,
And play the prelude of our fate.

Longfellow.

BRIGHTLY were the drawing rooms of Balcombe Priory illuminated when the night so anxiously anticipated by Euphemia at last arrived. Mrs. Conyngham dressed in smiles, as new as her feathers and as bright as her diamonds, swept majestically

from one to the other of her high-born guests, inquiring after their respective lap-dogs and children, with as much tenderness as if her own well-being depended entirely on theirs. Katherine, her dark hair wrapped round her well-formed head, moved queen-like through the long suite of handsome rooms. Her regular features, yet perfectly expressionless face suggesting the idea of beauty, yet failing to realise that idea; her fine form, charming by its dignity, yet failing to charm from its want of ease; and her entirely lady-like manners, pleasing from their polish, and yet failing to please from their absence of cordiality. Handsome she certainly was, and handsome every one thought her; but it was with the same kind of feeling with which one admires a well-executed statue.

Not so Effie. She pleased as a living, breathing reality: the luxuriance of the bright hair that hung in sunny waves upon

brow and throat and shoulders, restrained by a wreath of flowers, suited well the laughing face and sparkling eyes with which she flitted from one to the other.

“Lady Julia, let me find you a partner. Mr. Hope, do you dance? Oh yes, of course, what else did you come for. Mr. Hope—Lady Julia Taunton—there! the introduction is over. Make haste and take your places, or the music will be over too.” And away she tripped.

“Will you do me the honour of dancing?” began a gentleman.

“With you! oh dear, no; I am much too busy; so instead, just do that young lady the honour of dancing with her. Come, I will introduce you;” and before the unhappy victim had time to decline the honour, he found himself vainly endeavouring to spin both himself and a very voluminous partner round in the mazes of a most impracticable waltz.

In the mean time, Constance, after a few

spasmodic efforts to introduce partners to one another, which all signally failed, had at length managed to conceal herself in a recess behind the window curtain.

She knew well what her fate was in a ball room—to be neglected; so she left, though it must be owned a little reluctantly, both the duties and the pleasures of the evening to her sisters to enjoy. Neither dancing herself, nor asking others to do so, yet wishing to do both, she stood gazing with a misty face from her corner on the animated scene, as though she herself had no part nor lot in it. By degrees it grew still more animated and animating; fresh people came pouring in; bright eyes grew brighter; joyous music more joyous still; the evergreens drooped more gracefully, and the many-coloured lamps in the conservatory glittered like stars from out the deep rich hues of the variegated foliage and bright blushing flowers; while shadowy groups of young and lovely forms

kept glancing to and fro amid the wreaths of leaves, heavy with the weight of hot-house blossoms.

Very near Constance's hiding place stood a bench, inviting from its emptiness, and as may be supposed, as the evening wore on, it was not allowed to invite very long; two ladies took possession of it, and commenced a desultory conversation.

"Insufferably hot!" groaned one of them, a middle-aged damsel, whose head was blessed with the most curious combination of the vegetable and mineral kingdoms ever yet granted to the eyes of man to witness.

"Quite fearful," sighed her companion, with a face that matched her dress, both being decidedly passé, "for my part, it seems a most senseless custom, these balls—inviting people to be suffocated, I call it."

It was a new idea to Constance, it amused her and she kept playing with it a little while: when her thoughts were again at liberty,

the two ladies were criticising the dancing and the dancers.

“Atrocious! My dear Lady Arabella, do just look at that girl! What feet! Elephantine quite! Well, I do believe that the hippopotamus would perform better than that.”

“At least it would be better worth seeing,” thought Constance to herself, as she watched the ungainly movements of a first-rate specimen of that unfortunate class, young ladies between fourteen and fifteen, who invariably have unmanageable hair, white frocks, and countenances as blank as the same. Lady Arabella giving a half sigh and a whole yawn, murmured—

“Shocking, Miss Marsden, utterly disgusting!” then leaning back, she half closed her eyes with a fashionable ennuyé air.

Miss Marsden’s tongue, however, was not tired; so in default of a listener, she went on making a running commentary to

self of the dresses and faces of the company present.

"Ah, there is a pretty toilette — very pretty; white crêpe — is it crêpe, though, I wonder? Yes, surely it is; and a very pretty girl too. Ah," as the owner of the white crêpe came more in view, "why, I declare, it is one of the Miss Conynghams, pretty girl—very pretty girl! Lady Arabella, you are a great judge of beauty, is she not pretty?"

The lady addressed languidly raised her eye-glass for a moment, and looked carelessly at the young girl in question.

"She is well enough."

"Ah, there is my favourite, young Edgar Villiers," pursued Miss Marsden. "Lady Arabella, I appeal to you, is he not very distingué looking? not in the least handsome though, you know."

"Who? which?" said Lady Arabella,

opening her eyes, and looking as if she had just returned from Kamschatka.

“Why, Edgar Villiers; there! that gentleman with the dark hair; don’t you see him standing next to Sydney Conyngham?”

“Which is young Conyngham!” replied the lady, applying her eye-glass more vigorously than before.

“There he is, just in front of us, leaning against the door with his arms folded. Now he is coming towards us, I must speak to him. How do you do, Mr. Conyngham, I have not seen you yet to congratulate you on your return home. I have been trying to get an opportunity of doing so for the last week.”

“Miss Marsden, you overwhelm me with confusion. Why did you not let me know your wishes, and I would certainly have presented myself at your house to receive them,” replied Sydney, bowing low, to hide a somewhat suspicious smile about the corners of his mouth.

“Well, never mind now; but tell me, you must have seen a great many things; were you pleased?”

“Oh, of course, delighted. What else can a man say who does not want to be voted an ass? I went through the usual fever and ague fits on Vesuvius and Mont Blanc; nearly died with rapture over the Venus de Medici, and was struck back into life by the Apollo Belvidere. For any further ecstasies I must refer you to the book of travels I propose writing for the gratification of my friends.”

“Now, how kind of you,” ejaculated Miss Marsden, lifting up her hands in admiration, “you will let me have a copy of it; you know you are a special favourite of mine.”

“Am I really? how shall I ever prove my gratitude and my sense of the honour! Certainly you shall have my book—when I publish it.”

“Oh how kind,” replied Miss Marsden,

again taking it all in sober earnest, "well, I shan't forget: but now tell me, you must have found a great difference in your sisters."

"How? in what way, mind, manners, or conversation?"

"Oh, in all."

"Well, I assure you I am not sensible of it."

"Come, now, you must own at least, that two of your sisters are very handsome."

"H'm, yes; they are very well, they have grown up into presentable girls enough, quite pattern young ladies, I assure you; they work crochet, and look very well in a drawing room."

"Well, I can tell you they are very much admired; charming girls they are."

"Oh very."

"Now, Mr. Conyngham, I don't like that wicked look in your eyes."

"Dont you? I am very sorry; but unfor-

tunately my eyes are fixtures, else I might try to please you by exchanging them."

"Oh, I see what it is now, your sisters are not philosophical enough to suit you; but there is Miss Constance, she considers herself something above the common, does she not?"

Constance, who during the greater part of the previous conversation had been watching the dancers, catching the sound of her own name, heard Sydney say, as he gave a little short laugh—

"I don't know what she considers herself; she is like every other young lady as far as I can see, a common-place and ordinary girl enough."

A slight movement was heard on the other side of the curtain.

"Dear me!" said Lady Arabella, looking round, "what can that noise be! Did you hear it? I am positive it was something; pray, Mr. Conyngham,"—appealing to him—"don't you think so?"

“Undoubtedly ; but whether it be a rat or a ghost, madam, I cannot say.”

“Oh pray, but cannot somebody inquire ; in these old houses, you know, one hears of strange stories,” exclaimed Miss Marsden, catching the infection of fear ; “you will forgive me, Mr. Conyngham, for saying so, but would it not be better to have an investigation ?” she continued, looking nervously round.

“Certainly ; I will send to London for a detachment of the Dragoon Guards this very evening,” replied Sydney, gravely.

“Oh, but there it is again !” exclaimed Lady Arabella, and rising precipitately, in sympathy with Miss Marsden, the two ladies beat a retreat from the haunted corner, followed by Sydney, who kept consoling them with the assurance, “that very likely it was the spirit of some unfortunate lady, summoned up by the sound of waltzes to the scene of her former triumphs.”

Some minutes passed ; Constance's head had sunk upon her arms, and her dark hair shrouded both ; presently the arms were withdrawn, the hair slowly shaken back, and a pale quiet face, with an expression of pain upon it, gleamed up from beneath it. Joyous music resounded through the rooms ; graceful forms waved to and fro ; bright faces and light footsteps ; flowing locks "with the glad wreath bound ;" the glory light of youth and beauty, mingled with the ecstatic tones of mirth and joy, at each turn of the "flying dance," all flashed on the eye and ear. But as in a dream, they all passed before that still, sad face. What ! her brother ! he to whom she could have given such a depth of love, he set so little store by her affection !—"a common-place and ordinary girl enough"—cutting words, they pierced through to her very heart's core. She looked round on that gay company, and felt there was not one there with whom she

.

could claim sympathy. A strange thrill passed through her; she felt she was alone in the wide world. A fair girl passed near her, leaning on her partner's arm, and as she raised her eyes for the instant to his—Constance read in the looks of each, the secret of both. She looked after them a moment, then let her head sink down again upon her arms. Why was it? Others had something to love them best in the world—she had nothing. Others were permitted to gather up the gold and frankincense of their love, and store it all away in the heart of another,—while she—she, with that vast, that unbounded, sealed well-spring of devoted affection that lay sleeping in the depths of her being—why was she restrained from pouring it forth in the might of its fulness and being at rest?

There are seasons of intense loneliness in the life of every man; when the hand of God, removing every prop on which the soul is wont to lean, to teach him those

props are not eternal, leaves him a prey to his own weakness, that he may learn that the heart is infinite, and less than the Infinite cannot satisfy it; that he may feel that there is a void in his heart, which the love of God, and the love of God *only* can fill.

Religion was a great deal to Constance, but it was not yet the all in all; her spirit, aware of the empty nothingness of this world, had struggled up through its dust and mire into something like light and happiness, but it was still but the faint light of dawn, not the meridian splendour of the noontide day.

The room which had been thronged to overflowing before, began now to be almost deserted, for a general rush had set in towards the supper room. Then Constance, seeing that she was left alone, stole forth from her hiding place. The benches were mostly empty, the very musicians had left their places, scarcely a step or sound was to

be heard, where a moment before all had been life and gaiety; while the dark portraits of those whose outward life had long since faded from the Present into the Past, loomed heavy and dim from the old fashioned panelled walls, till in the stillness they seemed to start out into being, and inspire one with a feeling of terror. But Constance heeded them not; she stood still one moment, her hands tightly clasped, then the pent soul within, suddenly overflowing its boundaries, she gave utterance aloud to the burden of its passionate sorrow—"Oh for some one to love!" A sharp twang suddenly thrilled through the rooms—the sound died away in the distance, and silence once more reigned. A harp string had quivered and broken; it struck a warning note upon Constance's ear, and rang a knell of pain upon her heart—a spasm of fear shot through her—"And what if my prayer should be granted?" It was too much, she could bear

it no longer—she rushed from the room, and darting through an open window near, found herself on the verandah.

It was a glorious night. The lily moon floating on in a misty ocean of light, walked the heavens in its purity; one or two stars gleamed as points of silver in the dark depths of the blue sky; while beneath, though the deep shadows still lay sleeping on field and dale, the line of hills on the dim edge of the horizon, lifting up their pale cold brows into the silent air, had already caught warning of the coming of the sun, and lay in light beneath his smile.

The loud weary sounds of the day had no place there, the labour and the burthen of life no existence; for the tired earth, sick at heart of bearing the noise and the heat of its on-going, had obtained one little hour's reprieve, and laid upon the bosom of its Creator, slept and was at rest.

Constance stood and gazed, till slowly and

softly some of the peace stole in upon her weary heart, and she dared not feel herself alone in the wide world. How still the shadows were! How pure the moon beams, falling like tears of peace upon the heart! And then one deep, intense, fearfully urgent prayer for rest, for something that was not weariness, that was not earth—for something satisfying and eternal, rose from the troubled depths of that weary spirit, and lo! ere scarce uttered, across its tumultuous waves there came a breath, "I say unto thee, Be still," and they sank down to rest at the voice of God.

"May I have the pleasure of dancing this quadrille with you?"

Constance started; she had forgotten all about quadrilles and polkas for the time—"Dear me, what a bore," was her mental commentary—"Oh no, I won't dance—perhaps I'd better though," and consequently she squeezed out a faint murmur of something about "much pleasure."

The gentleman gave her his arm, and half repenting of her acquiescence, she went off with her tall companion to join the quadrille. "I wonder whether I am expected to talk," she thought to herself, as she gave a shy glance at his face. It was not a handsome face, neither particularly well cut, nor very well tinted, yet with a certain charm of its own about it—a fascination that many a more regularly good looking face might have lacked. "And what am I to talk about, if I do," she continued, "I wonder if he likes Shakespeare. Oh, but I can't plunge head-long into Shakespeare, and it is so missish to talk about parties. I daresay though he takes me to be a school-girl, and is sure to ask me whether I like dancing." And at the same instant Mr. Villiers (for that was the gentleman's name), as if to confirm her prophecy said—

"Are you fond of dancing?"

("Stupid man!") Not at all, I scarcely ever dance."

“ Really ? ”

“ I never dance if I can help it. (There, now, I’m in a pretty hobble ; he’ll wonder why I’m dancing now with him ; why am I ? I’m sure I don’t know). I mean—I mean that I don’t care for dancing in itself. (There now, I haven’t made it any better ; oh ! what a goose I am !) ”

“ You care for it then, because of its concomitants, I suppose, society and conversation,” said her companion, looking rather amused.

“ Oh, no, no,” exclaimed Constance, feeling very hot, and getting very red, “ I don’t care at all about conversation.”

“ If it is not a very impertinent question, what do you care about then ? ”

“ Oh, I don’t know—a great many things (Oh, I wish I was out of this !) ”

“ A great many things is rather general ; won’t you come to particulars—are you fond of music ? ”

“ Oh, yes.”

“ Drawing ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Reading ?”

(“ Bless the man, is he putting me quite through my catechism ?) Oh, yes.”

“ Tell me some of your favourite books ?”

(“ He thinks I shall say ‘ Bible Stories,’ I suppose ; or ‘ Easy Lessons in one syllable,’) Shakespeare,” with rather of a gasp, as if she had said something decidedly witty.

“ A safe answer, and a tolerably comprehensive one. It is your turn to cross over. Nothing else ?” when she had returned to his side, after having shuffled through her part.

“ Oh yes, heaps of things—books I mean. Don’t you think it is very warm ?”

“ Very,” replied her companion, laughing.

“ Oh, what an impracticable being !” sighed Constance, “ will this quadrille never be over ?”

It did come, however, to an end at last ; and to escape the heat of the room they ad-

journed once more to the verandah. Neither of them spoke at first, the contrast of nature and art struck them so forcibly; but at length Constance, unable any longer to restrain her admiration, with a sudden impulse exclaimed aloud,

“Oh how beautiful, is it not?”

Mr. Villiers was standing gazing on the silent shadows cast by the quiet moon, and he did not reply at once; when he did it was more as if he had forgotten his partner's proximity, and was speaking to himself.

“Yes,” he said in a musing tone, “it is too beautiful.”

Constance looked up suddenly, an electric touch seemed to quicken some chord within; then she said aloud in a quick tone,

“Few people would think so though.”

“Few people would *say* so perhaps; it would not be orthodox,” he replied with a smile; “but,” he continued in a graver tone, “at least on me, a beautiful landscape has

always something of a painful effect. Nature seems like a perfect melody, in which man is the only discordant note, and so spoils the whole."

"I should not like to think that," said Constance earnestly, "it makes a schism in the order of creation."

"Well, when man laid hold of the tree of knowledge, did he not let go the tree of life?"

Constance looked up to see if her companion was in earnest, for there was something in his tone which made her doubt it; a slight tincture of raillery that suited ill with the solemnity of the subject.

"Perhaps," he resumed more gently, as he caught a glimpse of the inquiring expression on her clear earnest face, "you are a great worshipper of nature?"

"Can any one not be? Could any one look upon a night like this and remain unmoved?" Constance answered, a sudden glow

mounting to her face—"Oh no, I never will believe it!"

"Nor I either," he replied, for a moment participating in her enthusiasm, "it is scenes like these that call forth one's buried energies; it may be but a moment, but in that moment have we not lived a thousand years?"

"Yes, oh yes," she said kindling, "and then we grow into poets, is it not so?"

"Very likely," he replied, returning to his old smile, "but to decide that point personal experience is very valuable; and as I have none such to offer, I cannot say."

The lights had paled, the evergreens had faded, and the rooms had thinned and thinned, till they were left to the undisturbed possession of the Conyngham family. Sydney, with his arms folded, kept pacing backwards and forwards, muttering at intervals,

"Insufferably hot! insufferably ugly all the girls were! insufferable altogether!"

“Pooh, stuff and nonsense!” Archie exclaimed, “as pretty a collection of girls as you’d find anywhere, I’d lay any money; didn’t I dance, that’s all! why I danced with all the pretty ones;” and he added, sotto voce, “a good many of the ugly ones too.”

“Well, my dears,” said Mrs. Conyngham, “I must say I think it went off very well. The supper was excellent; Gunter could not have arranged it better.”

“By the way,” said Effie, “where is Constance; I have not seen her the whole evening?”

“Probably the heat has dissolved her,” returned Sydney drily.

“Not she,” answered Archie; “an hour ago I saw her up to her chin in the mysteries of a philosophical argument with—what d’ye call the fellow—Villiers, isn’t it? She will come to light bye-and-bye; if not, we will have her cried as lost the first thing to-morrow morning.”

"Oh, here she is," said Effie, as Constance entered the room.

"My dear sister," continued Archie, going up to her with mock gravity, "you can't think what a state of inconsolability your afflicted family has been thrown into by your mysterious non-appearance; as to Sydney, his despair was such, that suicide would at once have supervened if he could only have made up his mind as to what was the most scientific method of undergoing it."

"How distressing!" answered Constance, laughing.

"And pray," he continued, putting his hands on both her shoulders, "how did you like it?"

She looked up into his face with a countenance actually radiant with animation.

"Like it? Did I like it? Oh yes; I never spent such a pleasant evening before."

"Then I pity you, that is all I can say," said Katherine.

"Well, 'pon my honour, she don't look as if she needed pity," said Archie, playfully, turning his sister round and round; and really the transformation one hour had effected in her appearance was marvellous; the pale face had acquired an unusual glow, and revelations of a new and strange beauty lay hid in the deeps of the beaming eyes, that were more than half veiled by the quivering eyelashes.

"Come, Conny," he added, laughing, "I don't despair of your turning out a beauty yet."

"Oh Sydney," exclaimed Effie, as she took up her candle, "did you remark Sir Edward Marsden?"

"I saw nothing to remark about him."

"Oh, but he is so handsome!"

"Is he? Provide me with a microscope next time, and perhaps I shall be able to discover it."

"Now, Sydney, how provoking you are! Well, then, did you see his sister?"

"Who could help it? that antiquated piece of furniture on the top of her head is evidently an heir-loom."

"So I should say," replied Katherine, "I wonder what people neither useful, nor ornamental, want in a ball room:—poor Miss Marsden, nothing could be worse!"

"Worse! my dear, what's the matter? who is worse?" exclaimed Mrs. Conyngham, catching the last words as she was leaving.

"No one at all, ma'am, excepting a lady with a botanical garden on the top of her head," replied Sydney, with his usual smile of sub-satire, as he took up his candle and left the room. The family party separated. Constance reached her room, and then drawing back the window curtain, stood with her hands on the window sill, watching the coming up of the day. A sudden sunbeam had flashed that evening over the landscape of her life, whether never to fade from thence, or soon to be quenched in the living light of

tears—who should say ? She stood on the verge of a great gulf, and like a tired child, she laid herself down to sleep among the flowers that grew on its bank, unheeding that beneath the soft music of its waters, as they rippled up on the shore of her soul, there lay hidden the capabilities of the future storm, and the torrent power of passion.

Strange ! how often our feet falter on the horizon of a new order of things, and our eyes are holden that we know it not !

The young girl, after prayers, which that night were praises, laid herself down to sleep, and dreamed of beautiful landscapes, starlit skies, and —Edgar Villiers— but dreamed not that her destiny had already passed from her own to another's keeping ; knew not that *that* night had been struck the key-note that was from that day henceforward to restrain into unity the wandering tones of the varied melody of life—for the hand of God rested on the harp of life, and the prelude was already played.

CHAPTER VI.

“ Oh we live ! Oh we live !
And this life that we receive,
Is a warm thing, and a new,
Which we softly bud into ;
From the heart, and from the brain,
Something strange that overmuch is,
Of the sound, and of the sight,
Flowing round in trickling touches
Of a sorrow and delight.”

E. Barrett Browning.

“ The leaves of memory seem'd to make
A mournful rustling in the dark.”

Longfellow.

“ DEAR me ! how very tiresome !”

“ What's the row now ?” was Gerald's laconic observation, in answer to Katherine's exclamation, he being at home for the mid-summer holidays.

"Why, somebody has been drawing faces over that picture of mine I was doing—was it you, Gerald?"

"Not I."

"I am sure it must be you! What plagues schoolboys are!"

"Complimentary, certainly—it wasn't me I tell you, it was Constance's doing."

"Constance! She is always doing some careless thing or other—Constance!" said Katherine, going to the door and slightly raising her voice.

"Did you call me?" was the reply, as Constance entered the room.

Two months had passed since her conversation with Mr. Barnard: it was now May, and the trees had grown young again in the light of spring, and with their new birth Constance's face and character had kept pace.

There was a perceptible difference even in the way she opened the door in answer to Katherine's summons. There was more of

purpose and aim in every movement. She had struggled hard of late with her natural faults of disposition; her hair was smother and more glossy; her dress fitted better than it used to do; while the weary look of dissatisfaction with herself and life, that had so long marred the expression of her face, had given way to a brightness, that springing from some deep holy well of the heart, made that face fair in its youth. But, poor Constance, she had many faults still: her want of thought and untidiness, often bringing her into sore trouble, with the tidy Katherine particularly.

“Constance, I do wish you would be more careful,” said Katherine, “Gerald says you have been spoiling this drawing of mine.”

Constance began an indignant expostulation. “I!” then stopped and looked confused—“Oh Katherine, I am very sorry; it was my fault I believe, though I didn’t do it. When I was teaching Georgy White

this morning, little Ally got hold of it, and before I was aware, she scribbled over it."

"Just like you!" was Katherine's rejoinder — "any one else would have taken care to put things out of the way of dirty little fingers. Pray be careful another time," she continued, as Constance went up to the window-sill, and leaning her arm on it took up a book.

A loud "hallo!" startled her.

"Why, what's the matter now?" she said, in a half vexed impatient tone, as Gerald, rushing up to her, gave her arm a shake.

"Can't you look what you are up to?" he said indignantly, "you've been and knocked my boat, my cork boat I'm making, on the head! What a piece of awkwardness you are! Can't come near anything, but you knock it down, sure as a gun!"

"Dear me, I'm very sorry, but why do you put your boat in people's way?"

"Any one but you, with half an eye would

have seen it," said the aggrieved Gerald, sweeping together his boat-making materials, and taking them with a very injured air out of the room—"You'll catch it, if you don't keep a sharp look out next time, I can tell you."

Constance, looking rather disconsolate, returned to her book, but the long streaks of sunlight would come and lie upon the page, and blazon it over with a glory not its own, while the wreaths of roses that hung in festoons round the window, stealing some of the sun's rich lustre, looked in upon her like a smile of the future. Down went the book very soon.

"Oh I can't read, it's impossible," she said, half aloud, "quite impossible to read fusty, musty history, when the whole outer world is full of light. Oh dear me ! life really is very beautiful ! I wonder what made me think the doleful things I used to think about it. Let me see, I'm eighteen now—well, I

think I am very happy after all! I wonder ten years hence what I shall feel like—even five-and-twenty seems a long way off now, quite old! and eight-and twenty! By that time how many things may have happened, *must* have happened! I wonder whether I shall be here then? I wonder whether all things will go on just as they do now, for long? I wonder, oh I wonder whether our lives will always flow on so quiet, making scarcely noise enough to say they *are* going on, as they do now?" And with that Constance laid down her head on the open book, and went out into the shadowy brightness of dreamland, while the summer sunshine touched up the chesnut hair into brightness, and wove a wreath of sunbeams round the dreaming head like a saint's crown of glory.

"Wake up, Conn—in a brown study, eh?" said Effie's voice; and Constance looked up and saw Effie's little face appearing at the window.

"Oh Effie, come in," said Constance, suddenly remembering good resolutions and duties together, "it is an hour passed our reading time, do come now, or it will be too late."

"Never mind it to-day."

"Oh but it is 'never mind it' every day, you really ought to employ yourself."

"Employ myself! never did in my whole life—don't know how."

But Effie came in, notwithstanding, and let Constance get Alison's History of Europe, that they were by way of reading together, then sat down with the dog Fido in her arms, while her sister finding the place, began—

"Within the space of twenty years, events accumulated—"

"No doubt they did—Oh Constance, just think, Lady Bowen has sent us an invitation for a grand soirée on the 22nd! What kind of thing will it be, do you think?"

"Only do let me go on—Within the space of twenty years—"

"By the way, I wonder whether that Italian Countess who is coming to live at Dunscombe, has arrived yet. I wish she was come, because then Lady Bowen might call upon her, and ask her for the 22nd."

"Oh that 22nd!" groaned Constance.

"Isn't there some mystery about her? I do so love mystery. Is she come yet?"

Constance sighed. "How can I go on?" she said in despair, "if you interrupt me every moment."

"Dear me, I forgot. Well, I'll be quiet as two mice. Oh! Morris told me she saw furniture going in there yesterday, so she must be coming—only they say she is so odd."

Constance began again at the events which never seemed destined to accumulate — "Within the space of twenty years, events accumulated, and in that period was successively presented—"

"A great deal of nonsense, I dare say,

but just tell me—isn't she half English? does she mean to live alone? Isn't she too young for that? Shall we know her, do you think? Oh! but I forgot again—we were to be very quiet."

"No, Effie," exclaimed Constance, as she closed the book with an impatient gesture, "it is of no use, we must wait till your reading fit comes on, if indeed it ever does."

The door opened, and an unruly shock of hair made its appearance at the aperture. "Hallo! now children, I say what's all this row about? There are visitors in the drawing-room, and Papa is going out in half an hour, but of course you don't want any of you to go—" and the shock of hair made its exit.

"Gerald, Gerald, stop!" called out Constance, running to the door, "does Papa want any of us to go with him?"

"Ask him, he knows better than I do."

"No—now, Gerald, did he send you with a message?"

“No—yes—no, that is, he said you might go, if you liked, but I thought you wouldn’t like, so I said no, for certain.”

“Dear me, Gerald, you are very kind, but you might let one decide for one’s self.”

“Well, decide away, who hinders you, I should like to know.”

Constance went to find her father. He said he was only going to walk to Dunscombe to see if he could speak to his lawyer, who he heard was to be there that afternoon, as he wished to have a few minutes’ conversation with him on a matter of business that must be settled at once. Either Constance, or one of her sisters might go after luncheon with him, if they liked; but it would be very stupid for them unless they fancied roaming about the house and grounds alone, which they could do if they pleased, as he believed its present owner had not yet taken possession.

Dunscombe! there was nothing better that

Constance liked doing, than going to see this strange old place, so soon, if report spoke true, to be inhabited by an Italian Countess of both youth and beauty; the same lady who had disturbed Constance's reading. There was a strange mystery hanging over this Italian. The estate she had lately inherited by right of her mother, who had been an Englishwoman. Report also said she meant to live very secluded, holding no communications with the neighbours round, so of course the neighbours revenged themselves by holding a great many communications about her.

"Here we are at last," said Mr. Conyng-ham, when after rather a long walk, he and Constance came in sight of the Duncombe grounds, her sisters having preferred to go out driving with their mother.

"It belongs to the Countess—the Italian, doesn't it, Papa? I suppose she has not yet arrived, though."

"Of course not, my dear, or I should not come. My business is only with my lawyer, Mr. Sawyer. I wanted to see him, and I heard he was coming here to-day."

"Mr. Sawyer!" repeated Constance to herself. She knew the man well, and his name better. She had learnt to connect his presence with an increasing gloom on her father's face; and an almost imperceptible shadow, daily lengthening on the hearth of home. Her father had grown dark-browed and gloomy lately.

They were nearly in front of the house. It was a very ancient one. A smooth lawn slanted down southwards, towards a sheet of water, on which a few solitary swans floated on in the calm consciousness of beauty: while towards the west, an opening in the line of hills in front, allowed the beams of the setting sun to come and go at will, on the face of the landscape. Yet there was something of a neglected look about the

whole place, betokening the absence of its possessor; and the cawing of the rooks as they swept hurriedly by, brought back to the silent heart, the dreamy music of other days.

They came to a gate; Mr. Conyngham gave it a push, and it swung back with a sullen sound. The path was partly overgrown with weeds, and the envious boughs had done their best to exclude the sun from the young grass that grew beneath, though here and there a wandering ray of light stole in, and laid a kiss on the folded eyelids of the sleeping flowers.

"This is not the principal entrance, Constance, but it is the nearest," said Mr. Conyngham, as they emerged from the path, and stood on the raised terrace that went round the house.

"I think you must wait here, my dear, while I go and knock at the door."

Constance obeyed, and while her father went rapidly forward, her thoughts travelled

still more rapidly back to the past, and on to the future. The afternoon which had clouded over, had now cleared up again : the thick masses of clouds had slowly rolled away from the hill sides, and the beams of the sinking sun came slanting up through the gap between them, and laid their soft hues on the plain beyond. How many had stood on that terrace before her, watching that setting sun ! and how many would stand there after her ! Her thoughts followed the sunbeams, as they went from hill to stream, and from stream to valley, till at last they followed them up again into heaven. Her father's voice roused her from the dreamy reverie into which she had fallen—

“ Constance, Constance, where are you ? ”

She hastened along the terrace, and found her father and Mr. Sawyer waiting for her at the entrance door.

“ My dear,” said Mr. Conyngham, “ I may be detained I find, rather longer than I ex-

pected. If you like to go in and rest, Mr. Sawyer says you can."

"Yes, Sir—certainly, Ma'am. There is a gallery of very fair portraits attached to the house: perhaps the young lady might find something to interest her there."

"Well, Constance, what do you say? Perhaps that will be as good a way of passing the time as any. I don't expect to be much longer than a quarter of an hour."

Constance assented, and Mr. Sawyer, after having bowed her up a few staircases, and down a few passages, left her to herself and to the digestion of his civil speeches.

It was a fine long gallery, and Constance looked up at the quaint old portraits that adorned the walls, with a strange thrill of awe. Here there smiled out a damsel in all the glory of red cheeks and white muslin: there, stood a lady in all the pride of hoop and ruff, with a bird quietly perched on her right hand: farther on, a young man in the

costume of the last century, stood with outstretched arms and feet, looking—‘ My name is Norval’—over an odd combination of “wishy-washy” plains and elevations, by courtesy called mountains. Yet they all had lived ; lived, not only collectively, but individually ; lived, not only the outer life of custom and accident, but the inner life of thought and feeling. Down the faded cheek of that once blooming girl, the tear of affection had fallen : beneath the stiff apparel of that outward fashion, a mother’s heart had beat : the struggle of life with them had been the same—its tokens were on their brows, and its scars burnt into their hearts. Yet that page of human life there unfolded, was now closed for ever : that scene in human existence there portrayed, had come and gone to return no more, and the actors therein had played their little part on the world’s great amphitheatre, and now were—where ? Ah ! though the book of human life may contain

many pages as yet unwritten, who shall make those that have once borne the impress of writing, a blank again?

Constance stood still, as these thoughts crowded through her mind, and the perception of that endless 'now,' flowed upon her soul with a sense of pain. What! the ceaseless years of eternity, are they all suspended on the moment of time? What! this human existence that shews but as a point in the vault of immensity—is it destined to last for ever and for ever? when suns are hid in darkness, and stars have ceased their light? "For ever and for ever!" Thought travelled on to that "ever and ever," but thought refused to compass it. In vain aching fancy piled days on days, and years on years, centuries on centuries—no nearer did she seem to that "for ever and for ever" of eternity. With a feeling almost of terror, she recoiled from the gulf into which she was gazing, and hid her face in her hands. Suddenly her ear

was arrested by the sound of music. She started ; where could it come from ? for her thoughts had gone on, and fallen into the future, and its echoes came back to her in syllables of pain. She moved hastily forward down the long gallery, the music becoming more and more distinct, till she came to a door before which hung a curtain, and which opened upon the gallery. The door was partially open, and without reflecting, Constance drew close enough to see in without being seen, the curtain shading her from view. In the centre of the room, dark with oak-pannelled walls and antique pieces of furniture, stood a lady bending over a harp, from whence her white hands as they idly strayed over the chords, started angel notes into existence ; while the bonnet she had thrown carelessly aside on a chair, and the shawl that still draped her fine form, showed she had but that instant arrived. Through the narrow pointed window of stained glass, its

medley of colours flung on the carpeted floor, one ray of intense light had concentrated itself on her up-lifted brow; the head was slightly thrown back, and the raven tresses flowed in rich bands away from the noble featured face, till she irresistibly reminded one of a prophetess, who, playing with hidden things, had raised for one instant the curtain of futurity, and then appalled at the sight, stood dizzy and entranced on the verge of the dread gulf of the unknown.

Constance, in a moment, guessed she must be the Countess of whom so many strange stories were current, and thought probably, as she was supposed to be very eccentric in her movements, she had come over to see her future home, without having given any notice of her intention. Constance turned to make her escape, but the lady moved, and then let her hands wander over the chords again. They vibrated into a few notes of intense melody, and drawing the harp closer

to her, with a touch that seemed to wake love from every string, as her fingers swept them each in turn, she called up such a flood of thrilling harmony, till the very instrument seemed to quiver with delight. Constance found herself spell bound, and compelled to listen whether she would or no. It was a wild unfettered strain, bursting spontaneously from the heart—joy, sorrow, victory, were there : the love of the woman, the fervour of the enthusiast, the might of the hero, and the triumph of the martyr, all were there, rising, falling, now the one, now the other predominant ; and ever and anon, through that tangled maze of thought and feeling, rose distinct and clear, the measured chant of a silent psalm, as it is in life's mingled melody, when beneath the full ringing of the chords of a loud prosperity, may be discerned the quiet underchime of a veiled and secret sorrow. Constance stood motionless, drinking in the waves of sound, as the thirsty drink in water,

while the lady's voice still flowed on. Gradually it died out into a plaintive wail,—

“Is there aught thou deeply prizest?

Know—it shall decay:

Is there aught thou lovest closest?

Know—*that* God shall take away.”

Then it quivered altogether into silence, and the tears both of the singer and the listener, beat a mute accompaniment to the echo that had ceased to vibrate on the ear, because it had gone down deep into the heart.

“Constance! Constance! make haste! I want you.”

The words came sounding up the long gallery, and with a quick sense of shame at the indiscretion she had been committing in listening unseen, she turned hastily and ran down to meet her father, half afraid lest the lady should have heard his voice, and detected her presence. Of course she was the Countess Lucchesi, but surely her father was not aware

she was in the house, or he would not have come. Did Mr. Sawyer know it? Constance was going to ask the question of her father, as she came up to him, but he stopped her, saying in a quick, hurried tone—

“My dear, I find I shall have to go to Mr. Sawyer’s house on my way back. I am sorry I brought you, for it will be very tiresome for you, yet I cannot send you home alone. What will you like to do?”

“If you do not mind my coming with you, I shall like that best,” replied Constance, with a glance of dismay at her father’s cloudy brow and agitated manner; “you know that is half way home, at least it is easier to get home that way, it is a quieter road.”

“Very well, my dear, then come, and if I am detained you must just go home by yourself, by Farmwood Lane and the Upton Road, that is quiet enough as you say.”

Constance, in spite of her longing to ask her father, whether he or Mr. Sawyer knew

that the Countess was in the house, had tact enough to ask nothing just then, so instead, pondered in her own mind of that strange glimpse she had just had of her. Would she ever see her again? or was it one of those strange meetings in life, where 'Goodbye shakes hands with Greeting!'

"One touch of fire, and all the rest is mystery!"

CHAPTER VII.

Each trial has its weight, which whoso bears,
Knows his own woe, and need of succouring grace :
The martyr's hope half wipes away the trace
Of flowing blood ; the while life's humblest cares
Smart more, because they hold in Holy Writ no place.

Lyra Apostolica.

“ All are not taken ! there are left behind
Living Beloveds, tender looks to bring,
And make the daylight still a happy thing ;
And tender voices to make soft the wind :
But if it were not so—if I could find
No love in all the world for comforting,
Nor any path but hollowly did ring ;
And if before these sepulchres unmoving
I stood alone, ...
I know a voice would sound, “ Daughter, I AM ;
Can I suffice for heaven and not for earth ? ”

E. Barrett Browning.

MR. SAWYER'S house was in the principal street of the little town near Balcombe

Northwych, a narrow uncomfortable looking street, and an equally narrow uncomfortable looking house.

“Dear me,” thought Constance to herself, “how I should hate living in such a place—such a view of chimney pots ! it wouldn’t be living, it would only be existing !”

They went into the house, and Constance thought it even more gloomy inside than out—added to which there was that combined scent of dinner and stuffiness, indigenous to small houses,—a kind of general atmosphere of ‘smell,’ which was anything but inviting.

“If Miss Conyngham will not object to resting in this room, while we transact our little business together, sir,” said the lawyer.

“Oh yes, anywhere will do ; it will only be for a few minutes, my dear, I hope,” said her father, as Mr. Sawyer opened the door of a room leading out of the small hall, and she entered.

A perfect chorus of voices burst upon her

ear as the door closed again upon her. Looking round, she saw she was in a room with folding doors, which being partially open, disclosed to view half a dozen noisy children gathered round a table, on which a few books, and a slate or two, indicated lessons ; while at the top of the table sat an insignificant looking individual, whose general appearance indicated governess.

"Get your books," Constance heard the latter say, "at once now. Frederick, don't dog's-ear your grammar like that. Your sum, Alfred, get it this moment. Blanche, take your arms off the table. Alfred, how many times am I to ask you for that sum?"

"Here it is," said the boy in a surly tone.

She looked at it for a moment, then gave it him back : "It is all wrong."

"Can't help it."

"Don't speak to me in that tone, sir : what do four, and five, make?"

"Don't know."

"Go, and find out then."

"Shan't," he replied with Spartan brevity, and threw the slate down on the ground.

"Won't you?—we shall soon see." A civil war ensued, which ending in the complete discomfiture of the young rebel, he was sent to garnish a corner of the room, while the victor sat down to wage war with the next little pickle.

"Violetta, I told you to learn your lesson, not pick holes in the table-cover. Blanche, are you going to be all day over that geography—come and say it at once."

Miss Blanche, a young lady whose appearance presented a complete antithesis to her name—face and hair being mutually on fire, here ambled up with her book in her hand, and her finger in her mouth, and began—

"London, situated on the Serpentine, is a—"

But the governess's hand the next mo-

ment gave occupation to her mind of a different description, and for the following five minutes, she seemed aware of nothing but that tears were situated in her head.—She was then dismissed to be a vis-à-vis to Master Frederick, while No. 3 was called up.

“Violetta, are you ready now?—Blanche, stop that noise this instant.”

Violetta fortunately was rather more ready than her sister, so a comparative silence of ten minutes ensued, while she was being put through her paces in French, and spelling—That over, then came hopeful, No. 4.

“Joanna, let me see your copy?”

This young lady had profited by the temporary cessation of hostilities to illuminate her History of England with a series of original designs, so that instead of the copy “Industry” written out in text hand, the points and exemplification thereof were only forthcoming in a remarkable natural curiosity

portrayed on the first page of Goldsmith's History, bearing the designation—"This is a Briton."

"Oh dear me!" sighed the poor governess, "were there ever such children before! —I'll have you write this copy, Joanna—I will indeed—(Frederick, stir, Sir, if you dare.) So begin at once. There, have I not told you fifty times already not to stand on one leg? Now you are leaning your elbows on the table, with your head poked down.

"Come, that's rather better, now begin."

A comparative stillness of two minutes ensued, while Constance, as she looked at the dingy little room, with its dark monotonous patterned paper, and its only ornaments two prints—the Queen over the chimney piece, and the Duke of Wellington opposite, staring her out of countenance, pondered on the misery of being a governess. The teacher's voice disturbed her meditations. "Where's Violetta?" A search after the

missing damsel being instituted, she was discovered quietly seated behind the arm-chair, pursuing her investigations into the nature of her governess's workbox. Out of a laudable spirit of inquiry, the young lady had pushed her researches so far, that the object of it had already given way to her pressing solicitations, by obligingly breaking in two. Constance saw the catastrophe, and anticipated the result in the anger of the governess, so also did the child, for she began to cry in expectation of what was to follow. But they were both mistaken — the poor governess merely bent down quietly over the scene of devastation, collected the scattered relics of the attack, and without one word of reproof to the thoughtless author of the same, laid them without speaking in her lap. Constance saw, as she shaded her face with her hand, one or two tears fall slowly upon them. Oh, the silent language of those tears! The carelessness of a wayward child

had, perhaps, destroyed the gift of a father's tenderness ;—perhaps, a mother's hand, on which the dust of death now lay heavy, had stored it with many a token of a mother's care ; or, perchance, some absent friend had bestowed it as a memorial of a love that needed none, because enshrined in the hearts of both. Here the door opened, and a maid brought Constance a message from her father, "he feared he should be detained some time longer, so he wished Miss Conyngham to be so good as to go home." Constance was glad enough to obey, for the poor governess's tears had fallen on her heart, and lay like a heavy weight there. "Why was it?" she thought to herself as she walked along, and contrasted the fate of the two beings that that day had brought her in contact with—that on one every gift seemed to unite, while from the other every gift seemed to have been taken. The old room came back upon her with its dimmed and mellow light, stream-

ing through the tinted window on that glorious form with the ever-flowing river of song gushing up from the depths of her throbbing heart, and then fancy shifted the scene, and brought back too the little dingy parlour, the faded walls, the quarrelling children, and the few sad tears, till human shortsightedness was ready to ask the question: "Wherefore the difference?"

A turn in the lane brought Constance in sight of an old man bending down over the bank beneath the hedge. She quickened her steps, as she recognised Mr. Barnard, who was busy looking for his treasures, as he called the leaves and flowers. "Eh! What! Why, my child, is it you," he said, looking up at the sound of her voice, "well, I am very glad to see you."

"Busy, as usual, I see Mr. Barnard."

"Busy, aye, busy, watching the foot steps of God, my child."

"And what have you got here?" she

said, taking up some flowers that lay on the ground.

“Why, when any flowers take my fancy, I carry them home, just dry them, and then put them by in a book I keep for the purpose, and if I find anything very choice, I just keep it apart in my pocket book; here is one ‘memento mori’”—and opening his pocket book he took out from thence a withered snow-drop.

“Ah, Mr. Barnard, what possessed you to take such care of such a poor little piece of decay?”

“Because it is the text of an eloquent sermon.”

“How?”

“The soft winds of this last genial winter had been wooing the young leaves to come out and bud, and one coy snow-drop, silly child, listened to the song of earthly flattery, and unfolded its breast of snow too soon, for the keen north-east came, and see,” he

held up the trembling little flower, but the cold had seized it, and it hung its head sorrowfully.

"Poor little thing ! it was quite blighted."

"Quite—And do you know why?"

"No—Why?"

"Because this silly flower has followed its own will, instead of waiting for God's. It was weary, staying hid away in the silence of the earth ; so instead of biding till the finger of Providence pointed to the hour, it chose its own time and place, and this is the consequence."

"It is the old story of want of faith, Mr. Barnard."

"And love too, if we only knew it."

"If?—that 'if' makes all the difference. Oh, Mr. Barnard, there is an 'if' to spoil every life, except, perhaps, for a saint," exclaimed Constance, passionately.

"A saint is but a man after all, and what one man has done, all may do."

"It does not seem like it though."

"Ah, my child, it is our own fault if it does not. We are ever making for ourselves pleasant pictures, laying over them the rich gloss of imagination, and then hanging them up in our hearts, till they hide from our eyes every glimpse of Heaven—this is one of the 'ifs.'"

"But, Mr. Barnard, these pleasant pictures, as you call them—we must have them—we can't do without them," exclaimed Constance, hurriedly.

"So man says; but God says, what?—'The day of the Lord shall be on all pleasant pictures.'"

"Ah!"

"The very things we hold the tightest, it is just those God strikes from our hold."

Constance looked up, a sudden quiver passed through her frame; she walked on hastily a few steps, then stopped and burst into tears. Mr. Barnard laid his hand

gently on her arm, and said tenderly—"My child, can we wonder that He who hath said—'My son, give me thy heart,' should cast out the idols from His temple?"

"But we cannot help ourselves," said Constance, impetuously, as she stilled her weeping. "Our relations, our friends—in short—they will fill our hearts, and do what we will, they will have most of our love."

"And therefore the axe is laid to the root of the tree, and the command goes forth—'Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?'"

There was a pause; then Constance said, "I can understand that in some cases, but oh! to have our life unsunned by love!"

"He, who loved us enough to give His life for us, will He keep back from us the gift of his love?" replied her companion gently.

"But the love of God seems so high up, that we cannot reach it."

"And, therefore, He became man that we might. God has placed us in our earthly

homes, and drawn us to one another by the tender and mysterious ties of affection, that by them, and through them, we might ascend to the comprehension of a love greater yet even than that whereby we were created and redeemed."

Constance shook her head—"Still I can't realize it quite."

"No wonder, while you give your love to man, and only your fear to God."

"How can one give anything else? Love requires sympathy."

"Precisely, and we don't find it through our own fault. Take one instance—prayer—In the words of another, 'We pray not for the things we really want, but for those we think we *ought* to want.' This, at once, prevents our realizing the fulness of Divine sympathy, without which, there can be no fulness of Divine love."

"But, somehow, it doesn't seem right—reverential, I mean—to bring up all the little

things that come to rub us even in one hour, in our prayers ! Perhaps some one has said a cross word, or we are prevented from going to some amusement, or we have lost something we wanted."

"My dear child, I will answer you again, not in my own words ; 'He, who prays for the coming of God's kingdom, when the sharp word of a friend is running like a dagger into his soul, or the loss of a wished-for pleasure fretting his heart, will succeed about as well, as the caged eagle who strives to soar into the heavens, and in consequence is beaten back by the wires of his earthly prison.' "

Constance drew a long breath, as she murmured, "It sounds very comforting."

"Aye, and is so. The love of God is the one true philosopher's stone ; it lay in the path of those who sought that stone, and therefore they passed it by as a common thing ; yet it is its alchemy that turns all it

touches into gold ; the rubbish of life ; the fearfulness of death ; and the wretchedness of sorrow."

"But," said Constance, stammering and blushing, "all this you have been talking of—would it satisfy one *quite*—entirely—I mean, if one were left quite alone in the world?"

The question needed no reply, for its answer was written in characters of light on every line of the old man's face. He spoke of religion from a knowledge of its blessedness, from seventy years experience, not from theory. He looked at the impetuous girl before him, for a moment in silence, then taking her hand, he said: "Perhaps you may not believe me now, dear child, but the time will come, when you will learn that though the last wind of sorrow blight the sheltering gourd, and take away the desire of your eyes with a stroke, the true source of your happiness still remains untouched. Will you care for the one drop when the

inexhaustible ocean of love itself is yours, for the one parted ray of light, when the undimmed fount of glory is yours for ever and ever?"

They came now in sight of Balcombe, and Mr. Barnard held out his hand, "I must go now, my dear," he said very kindly, "Good bye—God bless you—Only one word more—remember that, to St. Paul's question: 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' the answer was: 'I will shew him what great things he must suffer, for my sake.'"

He left her, and Constance walked on quickly, a vague fear gathering darkly round her heart. "God's will be done," she tried to murmur, then a sudden tremor came over her, "And what if He should take me at my word, and do His will?"

When she reached the house, at the door Effie met her, with the exclamation: "Oh, Constance, there is Mr. Villiers in the drawing-room, talking about German, and stuff; you'd better go in and see him."

CHAPTER VII.

“ But often in the world’s most crowded streets,
But often in the din of strife,
There rises an unspeakable desire,
After the knowledge of our buried life :
A thirst to spend our fire, and restless force,
In tracking out our true original course :
A longing to enquire
Into the mystery of this heart, that beats
So wild, so deep in us.”

Arnold.

“ The childlike faith that asks not sight,
Waits nor for wonder, nor for sign,
Believes, because it loves aright,
Shall see things greater, things divine.”

Christian Year.

EDGAR Villiers was the only son of a gentleman of good family and fortune, whose place, Glynvellan, lay contiguous to that of the Conynghams. He was not handsome,

but so nearly approaching to it, that he was often thought so. He had a mind which teemed with the ore of thought, rich by nature, and well worked by education; Providence evidently had intended him for pursuing noble aims, and a high walk in life, whether he fulfilled his destiny was another question. He went to church once every Sunday, heard the prayers, and dissected the sermon with the sang-froid of the present age, which in default of what it does not practise, makes up for it in what it does preach. He had, moreover, a vein of poetry in his temperament, and was consequently keenly alive to the imagery of religion; there were moments—for instance, when the hour of twilight falling upon the world—thoughts of stillness cradled his soul—or when the old echo of some haunting tone, summoned up by the present, from the deeps of the past, flung itself back upon his spirit, and struck its chords into melody—then he

thought, oh immeasurably, and felt, oh intensely, religious! No one knew better than Edgar Villiers what the theory of religion is, but the fact was, so acute was he in settling other men's duties, that he had no time left for settling his own. He had heard so much about religion, talked so much about it, and seen so much of it, that he had altogether forgotten to practise it. He had two sisters, both by way of being religious, but the religion of the one was chiefly shewn in the strict propriety, which laid its veto upon cigars, outlawed arm-chairs, and banished his favourite "lounge" from the drawing-room, looked upon a ball-room as a sink of iniquity, and dancing, as the short cut to perdition. As for the other, she was full of zeal and energy, could superintend schools, and organize choirs, but somehow she never seemed to get further than that, and while her brother was wanting a button sewed on his glove, or her father a letter copied, Cicely

Villiers was busy teaching Molly Gibbs the ten plagues of Egypt, or informing Tommy Stubbs of the meaning of the word Pentateuch.

Very unfavourable were the effects of all this upon Edgar Villiers, for he had keen eyes for the weak side of a cause, or character, and he soon discovered that while she could descant ably on the virtue of those who give "their body to be burned, and all their goods to feed the poor," the "charity that beareth all things, hopeth all things, suffereth long, and is kind," was infinitely too insignificant for her notice. Ever on the look out to "strain at a gnat," she "swallowed many a camel," for while the telescope of her faith, was busy descrying the stars over her head, her father was chafing at the irregularity that never did anything at the proper time, and her sister complaining that Cicely's ways were always so "tiresome." Thus circumstances had, in Edgar Villiers's case, helped to crust over the warm geyser springs

of life with an outer coating of coldness and caution : the accidents of youth and manhood had as yet only scratched over that surface ; and, perchance, it needed the sword thrust of a great sorrow to pierce with a sudden and dividing power, through the lava covering, whose growth was that of years—then, through the cleft and the chasm should spring forth the strong flame of an earnest and loving-hearted spirit.

Edgar Villiers had become a tolerably constant visitor at Balcombe, though whether he came to see Sydney, Mrs. Conyngham, or the young ladies, remained at first somewhat of a mystery. He held long arguments with Sydney, provided small talk for his sisters, and made himself generally useful to Mrs. Conyngham. For the first few times, Katherine put on her company face, and Effie her company manners when he appeared, but, by degrees, the first became too great an exertion to Katherine, and the second too much

trouble to Effie, as they became accustomed to his visits, which often ended in his being quietly turned over to Constance, for the duty of being entertained, which she accomplished by being afflicted with vehement fits of shyness at first, and ending by strange disconnected talks with him at last. Not very good though for a mind like that of Constance, still in a chaotic state and ready to catch at any thing and suck it down into its life, whether healthful, or pernicious, was the influence of Edgar Villiers. He had allowed himself to be absorbed very much by the present "dark-lantern" style of school, in religion as well as philosophy, which was then coming into fashion, as it is now in fashion, and while after the Carlyle mode he gave forth erratic pieces of oracular learning, and lost himself in the high sounding phrases of an Emersonian philosophy; Constance listened and puzzled herself as to whether he had got beyond her depth, or was out of his own. He

lent her books, the very superficiality of which, concealing their flimsiness, are consequently thought very profound. He brought her Carlyle, with his sharp, clean cut out sentences, full of pith, and point, saying the things which every one else has said, in the way no one else has said them. Emerson, with his mystic hints, that seem to mean so much, only because sometimes they just mean nothing at all. Goethe, and all his school, with Self for a central point, and a vague supposition of there being a God, somewhere or other, for their creed.

These were now the studies of Constance. How they agreed with the deeper life she had begun to lead is another question. She, herself, was dimly conscious of clashing influences in her mind, but as yet she could not distinguish whether the dreamy compound Edgar Villiers called religion was the portal of a yet holier and more innermost shrine of worship than she had been used to,

or whether it was the mere mirage of the hot and thirsty desert. Had her own faith been more settled, there would have been less chance of danger. She would then have been able to separate the ore from the dross ; now, the probability was, she would take the dross for the ore.—

“ Call it what you will—

Heart, love, life, name is but smoke

Hiding the glow of Heaven.”

Edgar Villiers had taken up Constance's Goethe, and was repeating this to her in English, as she and her mother were sitting together one afternoon in May. Mrs. Conyngham never paid much attention to these rhapsodies, (in fact, as Archie said, she had begun to look upon Edgar Villiers in the light of her daughter's German master, and treated him accordingly), while Constance was wondering whether it meant a great deal, or nothing at all, when the door opened,

and the servant announced, "Mr. Villiers, and Miss Villiers."

"Dear me, Edgar!" exclaimed Miss Villiers, when she had shaken hands with Mrs. Conyngham and her daughter—"quite an unexpected pleasure to see *you* here!"

"All the more delightful then," replied Edgar, laying down "Goethe," and not looking so particularly delighted himself at the interruption.

"Oh, of course;"—then turning to Mrs. Conyngham, she said, "We are planning a little picnic to Chepstow, and we hoped, perhaps you and all your party would join us."

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Conyngham, doubtfully—"I dare say some of us would be very happy."

"Oh, but you must all come—Agnes, you know is away, and we should not have made up this party at all while she is away, only we have two young ladies coming to stay with us to-morrow, and we want to give them as much amusement as we can."

"I hope you will not refuse, my dear madam," said Edgar's father, a stately old man, who looked all wires—"or it will be a great disappointment to us all. We propose going to Chepstow first, and dine there; then go to see Tintern Abbey afterwards."

Mrs. Conyngham looked still very doubtful; it was scarcely quite warm enough for a party of that kind, and then it always would rain at pic-nics—was not it better to defer it?

"It was unfortunate," Miss Villiers said, "but as it was principally got up for the two young friends, who were coming to stay with them, they could not very well put it off, and then Tintern was such a lovely place."

"What, for a pic-nic? — How do you do, Miss Villiers," said Sydney's voice behind, as he came in, and shook hands with her—"You mean to boil your kettle where the high altar once stood, I presume."

"Dear me, Mr. Conyngham! I didn't know *you* were so particular!"

“Well, certainly, it is the first time I ever heard that I was—but I like consistency, Miss Villiers.”

Miss Villiers did not look much the wiser for this, but she said, “Of course, every body did.”

“But what do you think the old monks would say? Do you think their ghosts will leave your tea-kettle any peace?”

“Really, Mr. Conyngham, you are too bad, we are not going to pic-nic *in* Tintern Abbey.”

“Hang it, no!” said Archie, who had come in during the colloquy,—“Good morning, Miss Villiers—don’t you hear, Sydney, man, it is to be at Chepstow. Hope you include me, Miss Villiers—an unlimited supply of champagne and gentlemen, absolute necessities of a pic-nic, you know.”

“To be sure,” answered Edgar for her, “a stray man is invaluable on such an occasion—just think, my dear fellow, how many

shawls you won't be useful in carrying."

"My brother wants to frighten you; but don't be afraid, Mr. Archibald, we won't work you to death."

"I am not afraid, Miss Villiers, I am only too proud."

"Oh, of course," replied Edgar, smiling, "did you ever hear of a man who didn't particularly enjoy carrying all the loose wraps of the company?"

"How on earth can you judge, eh?"

"Why on earth should I not judge, my dear fellow?"

"For the best possible reason, that you have never tried. Now I'm the best authority upon such subjects; ask my mother there, if I'm not. Why when a good-natured sort of a fellow like me appears anywhere, half-a-dozen young ladies start up with three or four dozen requests which I am supposed to find all the pleasure in life in complying with; but who would ask you, I should like

to know? However, there's nothing like being useful!"

"A very proper sentiment that, but so proper that I fear few people aim at it," returned Edgar.

"Are you going to become philosophical!" said Archie, in a comical tone, "because if you are, Villiers, I shall sheer off."

They all laughed—"Why?" asked Villiers.

"Oh, I thought it sounded like the beginning of an oration, and orations I cannot away with."

In the meantime Miss Villiers had persuaded Mrs. Conyngham into giving a conditional consent to the plan; at least, if it was a fine day, and Mr. Conyngham didn't disapprove. Hereupon in came Mr. Conyngham to speak for himself; he looked harassed and gloomy, and though politeness obliged him to listen while Miss Villiers talked and explained, he did not pay much heed, and at last said "Yes" in a hurry, rather to avoid

the trouble of saying "No," than from any other reason; and after a whispered request to his wife to come to his study, as soon as her guests were gone, as he wanted her opinion on a letter he was writing, he left the room; so far then it was settled, and Mrs. Conyngham's last demur of how they were to go, having been arranged by Edgar, there was no more to be said. "You see, Mrs. Conyngham," said Mr. Villiers the elder, "you will go in your carriage, we in ours, and we had better meet at a certain hour at Chepstow."

"Yes," said Archie, turning to Miss Villiers, "with one proviso—that I may go in your carriage; for though my sisters are excellent in their ways, yet one may have too much of a good thing!"

"I'll change places with you, Conyngham," said Edgar, "at least, if Mrs. Conyngham has no objection."

"A bargain!" was the reply, and after a

few more parting remarks, as to who was to go with whom, and how and where they all were to meet, and many hopes that the day after to-morrow, which was the time fixed, would be propitious, Miss Villiers, and the two Mr. Villiers, said " Good bye," and departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

Love took up the glass of Time, and turn'd it in his
glowing hands,

Every moment lightly shaken, saw itself in golden
sands.

Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all its
chords with might,'

Smote the chord of self, that trembling, pass'd in
music out of sight.

Tennyson.

“My love, don’t you think it is going to rain?” It was the day of the projected Tintern excursion, and Mrs. Conyngham was asking her husband’s opinion, on that most interesting subject—the weather!

“My dear, I really don’t know.”

This opinion did not help Mrs. Conyngham much, so she turned to Sydney—

“Sydney, love, is the glass falling?”

“Haven’t consulted it, ma’am.”

"Oh mother, what's the use of bothering about the weather," cried Archie, "of course it won't rain, there isn't a cloud in the sky."

"Yes, there is one in that corner," replied the matter-of-fact Katherine.

"Then let it stay there," replied Archie.

"Oh mother, please get into the carriage, it has been waiting half an hour already."

Mrs. Conyngham, aided with the collective force of her family, was standing on the doorstep in that pleasant state of mind when you haven't made it up upon a subject, and now she was half hoping that a good-down-pour of rain would save her the trouble of deciding, whether or no she should join the party to Tintern.

"If I have put one shawl into the carriage, I've put twenty, you can't get wet, mother, if it even does rain," continued Archie; "and if you don't go soon, it will be too late, as it is the Villiers's will be gone without us, and hang it one does like to be sociable sometimes."

Sociable enough they were going to be certainly, for when they reached Mr. Villiers's house, Archie soon found himself turned over as the prey of the two young ladies, with pink flounced dresses, and very pink bonnets, belonging to the Villiers' party. Well versed in the tactics of flirtation, they went at once to the battle, and fell upon him tooth and nail. Before he well knew where he was, the enemy had drawn out their forces in full array, and a rattling charge of shot was being poured right into him. Both young ladies knew the value of their eyes, and made use of them accordingly, but while the one rushed up with a loud shout to the battle, the other worked silently, at the undermining process, and killed by languishment.

"How dearly sweet the country is in summer," sighed pink bonnet No. 1, putting down her eyelashes, that being the strong point in her face—"don't you feel with me, Mr. Conyngham?"

“Oh uncommon jolly, but London is jollier still, beats the country hollow—doesn’t it now?” he said, appealing to pink bonnet No. 2.

“To be sure, I adore the drive in Hyde Park, such a delightful cram! don’t you enjoy a crowd?—I do.”

“Oh Marianne, what shocking taste, and I prefer simple pleasures, and the dear delight of green fields much more,” and down went the eyelashes again of pink bonnet No. 1.

There sat Archie between the two young ladies, in a delightful state of small flutter. Just at that age when the rubicon from boyhood to manhood is being past, it was charming to feel himself being attended to by his fair companions. He knew well enough that pink bonnet No. 1, was putting down her long eyelashes, exclusively for his benefit, as he did that pink bonnet No. 2, was always stroking her little gloves to shew what

very little gloves they were. It was so delightful, so soothing to his feelings; generally, he was obliged to play second fiddle to his elder brother and his superior attractions, but to-day he had the whole field to himself, and in consequence he began to think what very charming things pic-nics were. But, alas, for all human dreams! at this instant, Sydney, who was riding, came up with the Villiers's carriage, and instantly the two pink bonnets turned their guns upon the new comer.—Down went the eyelashes,—stroke went the gloves,—and this time not for Archie who sat unnoticed, sucking the head of his cane, and biting the tops of his new pair of gloves bought with a view to doing execution, while his views of pic-nics underwent considerable alteration.

Chepstow, however, was reached at last, and after dinner the whole party were to proceed to Tintern, then, if there was time, they were to go on to the Wyndcliff. Great

was the amount of chicken and champagne consumed, and great the increase of conversation, in consequence ; in fact the spirits of the company that had been rather flat hitherto, now rose proportionably, and it was a much more lively party that set out for Tintern Abbey, than had left for Chepstow.

He that has seen Tintern Abbey, has framed and hung up for himself a sweet picture in the fair halls of memory. It is one of those fair spots that glass themselves in the mirror of the soul, and lay their soft colours upon the heart, dyeing it through and through with the prismatic hues of their own loveliness. Time has claimed its vaulted roof as his own, and given in exchange the boundless canopy of Heaven. His touch is visible on the mouldering pillars, and beneath his step the green grass and the shy flowers have smiled out into existence. Here, a broken column, or a lonely stone tell where he has leaned his hand most heavily ; while

there, a part more entire than the rest, shews where Time in vain had struck his scythe, and broken it in the effort. A few solitary grave stones nestle in that grassy floor, which once owned for its inlaying, far other ornaments than the meek violet or the coy daisy. The whole ruin seems one vast tomb, wherein the Past has laid down and died, leaving for its memorial but the words carved on each mouldering pillar and each tottering stone—"Vanity of vanities—all is vanity."

The party who met at Tintern that day, however, were troubled with no such fanciful thoughts. Mr. Villiers started the question where the monks put up their quadrupeds, and Mr. Conyngham wondered whereabouts "the capital old fellows" kept their cellar. The two pink bonnets and Effie laughed and chattered and peered into every nook and corner, while Archie, in quality of escort, patted on the head every little broken image he could lay hands on. Constance, who, at

her own earnest desire, had been allowed to bring Basil, on condition he should be her charge, seated herself on the grass near him, and would have gone off into a kind of dream, if Edgar Villiers had not followed and saved her the trouble by going off into one himself, to which, as a matter of course, he seemed to expect her to listen.

“What changes Time brings with it!” he remarked: “This Abbey once echoing to the prayers of benighted monks—now, as time rolls on with its ever-advancing light, and swift steps of improvement, a witness to the civilization and enlightenment of the nineteenth century.”

The civilization and enlightenment of the nineteenth century being that instant represented by two elderly gentlemen discussing the stocks, and three young ladies settling the fashions, did not impress Constance very particularly, so she said, “I wish it did echo to prayers still.”

“So it does — Nature’s prayers ascend unimpeded.”

“Nature’s?—ah, yes”—but the term was so vague, poor Constance could not quite grasp the substance of those kind of prayers.

“No more life-killing superstition, the shackles are gone, rotted away, and men have exchanged slavery for free glorious liberty!” continued Villiers.

“Yes,” again hesitated Constance, but she could not quite see, why the exchange of the superstition that at least said prayers and sung hymns, where now ‘free glorious liberty’ drew ginger-beer bottle corks, and eat sandwiches, was such a vast improvement. Monks might be blind, and monasteries a mistake altogether, but why on earth there should be such an apotheosis of desecration, and ‘Io pœans’ over ruined abbeys, she could not quite see. Perhaps Villiers did, however, for he looked as pleased about it as if it was a piece of good fortune that had fallen to his own particular share.

“We gain a step age by age, and in this age the step has been a vault,” he said complacently; “you don’t agree with me, Miss Conyngham?”

“Yes—only I was thinking,” she answered hesitatingly, “the vault seems likely to clear religion, and everything else sacred.”

“Not the really sacred, only the shams. Surely you don’t regret monasteries?”

“Monasteries? Oh no! How could I? Men couldn’t have been born only to live and die in a prison!”

“Then why regret that the prison walls of the mind should be thrown down, and the soul allowed to worship its Creator in its own way? Take for instance, this very spot—do you mean to say, it is not a standing proof of the progress of human-kind that here, where once the poor soul cowered under the lash of ecclesiastical tyranny, and sighed away its life in the strait jacket of a priest-compelled ignorance—now, the blue sky

looks in unimpeded, and the song of birds floats through its cloistered aisles?"

Just at this moment, in floated the voice of one of the owners of the pink bonnets instead, "Oh, isn't grosselle a sweet colour for a ribbon, and oh, Agatha, can there be anything so recherché as bouton d'or?"

Poor Villiers! it was rather an unfortunate commentary on his high-flown speech! Constance did not care for monks or monasteries, it involved a question altogether out of her reach, but there was a strange, dreamy sighing of tears in her heart, towards some unattainable shore of ceaseless endless worship, where the daily sacrifice should not be taken away, but be a living and tangible reality!

Here Mr. Conyngham called out to them that if they meant to see the Wyndcliff at all, they had better go at once, as it was getting late, and Mrs. Conyngham came up to Constance to know what was to be done with little

Basil. "He can't go up the Wyndcliff, my dear, so what will you do with him?" Constance said, she would stay with him in the carriage while the rest of the party walked up the hill, and that being settled, the scattered groups collected together and prepared to set out; Mr. Conyngham carrying Basil, Archie still in painful attendance on the two pink bonnets, Miss Villiers with Sydney who had transferred his attentions from the latter to her, and was for the present most perseveringly polite to her, while Edgar, all at once, struck by the thought that he ought to do the civil thing, became suddenly oppressive in his civilities to Mrs. Conyngham. His father, trying to do the same by Katherine and Effie, met with little success, for the former did not care to waste her powers on him, and the latter thought him too great an old bore to be talked to at all. When they got to the place where they had left their carriages, there was, however, a slight

mishap. Some part of the Villiers' carriage had got damaged on the way, and ropes and carpenters had not succeeded in rectifying the mischief, and how were ten people to get stowed away in places for only five. Sydney offered his horse, a pretty safe offer, considering the number of the ousted candidates; but after some delay an old fly was disinterred from an adjacent catacomb, and the luckless six over handed into it. A lovely conveyance it was, neither open nor close, but in a transition state betwixt both, and as it rattled and rumbled along, Archie asked Constance, if they did not look for all the world like six pills in a pill box, while Effie, who was sitting opposite, nearly went into fits of laughter, watching the involuntary movements of the stately Edgar Villiers, whose head shook like a Mandarin's, at every bump the beautiful carriage gave.

They arrived at last, and all, excepting Constance and Basil, having tumbled out of

the fly, in the best way they could, proceeded up the hill, after that Edgar had in vain tried to persuade Constance to join them.

"Here comes Papa," said Basil, after a quarter of an hour had passed since they were left alone—"And, oh, thank you, sister Conny, I have so enjoyed Blue Beard."

"My dear," said Mr. Conyngham, coming up to the door of the carriage, "I have found a nice seat just above; they are all there—if you would both like to get out, I will carry you, Basil, my boy, and you can see the Wye plainly from it."

"How nice!" said Basil, as his father gently lifted him out, and followed by Constance, carried him to the seat, a few yards above. They were all there, but Sydney, Villiers and Archie were standing a little in advance of the others, half hidden from view by the shrubs; they were in the middle of a conversation, and Constance could not avoid

catching every word that was said. Sydney was the speaker, and she heard him say—
“Oh happy time, when one believes in one’s self, and in the world too! when men are angels, and life is fairy land!”

Then Edgar answered, and she scarce knew the tone, it was so different in its ‘laisser aller’ manner from his usual way of speaking to her. “The creed of youth, only youth won’t leave us true to it long; the knowledge of life brings other articles of faith, and a very different catechism.”

“You are complimentary, gentlemen,” said Archie, “pretty mince-meat you are making, don’t believe in principles either—eh?”

“Principles!” exclaimed Villiers, “in these days there are no principles—they are only views.”

“Well,” said Sydney, “my creed is summed up in few words—all the world are either knaves or fools, and if, as Paddy says, they

are neither one nor the other, they are both."

"A short creed any how, if not a very pleasant one," said Villiers. "And a true one too. What is society?" continued Sydney with energy, "but a consolidated humbug, a great mountain of shams! social shams, military shams, mercantile shams, religious shams."

"Plenty of them," said Villiers, with a smile of half amusement curling his lips, "I always admire that religion which preaches self-denial from a sofa, and enforces abstinence directly after dinner—so likely to be effective."

"Pretty state of things, indeed!" said Archie, "if that is what your good people do."

"Well," continued Villiers, "I don't quarrel with Tom, if he chooses to believe what Dick doesn't, but I do quarrel with Tom, if he preaches up that all men ought to be saints, and is himself the greatest sinner of the whole."

"All 'ad captandum,' my dear fellow," rejoined Sydney, "there is a floating capital of good appearances swimming on the world's outer surface, it is 'pro bono publico,' and people use it when they want it, and as they want it. All 'ad captandum,' I assure you."

"Or, in other words, confounded humbug," muttered Archie, as he moved away.

"Yet humbug rules the world," continued Sydney, with a sneer on his lips, "and while a man can fast on his three meals a day, and deny himself on his ten thousand a year, both fasting and self-denial will be at a premium; but try the reverse, make theory give way to practice, and you will soon find ample cause to exclaim with Massillon, 'Oh Dieu, où sont vos élus, et où est votre partage!'"

"Poor human virtue," said Villiers, with something of a sigh.

"Poor human nature you mean—as for human virtue, it is a myth!"

"Except as a matter of comparison per-

haps — sometimes though,” answered Villiers, and there was a shade of sadness in his tone, “one feels one would give a great deal not to be compelled to class one’s boyhood’s faith with the things that *were*.”

Sydney, who perceived that Villiers was fast getting into what Archie called one of his ‘good-boy’ fits—a compound dream of feeling and fancy — here made a vigorous diversion, “Come, come,” he said, putting his arm within that of his companion, and drawing him on a few steps, “take my advice, my good fellow, expect nothing from your fellow creatures, and as infallibly you’ll get nothing from them, then, you can’t be disappointed.”

“Eh, sister Conny, what does he mean?” and Basil’s little face was raised to Constance’s pleadingly, as she sat beside him on the grass, watching the retreating forms of Sydney and Villiers. “I can’t make it out—is he naughty?” said he, pointing to Sydney.

Basil, too, had heard the words of bitter sarcasm wrung out from the cold heart of a worldly man; but he, the river of whose young life had flowed on untainted from the beginning, what sense had those words for him? Happy child! the sunbeam of his life passed unwavering through the atmosphere of earth, and came forth undimmed and rejoicing. "Naughty? oh no, he wasn't naughty, —there are not many naughty people, are there, sister Conny?"

But Constance could only answer, "I don't know, darling, some people are naughty, many perhaps." She was troubled; on the clear stream of her life the shadow of evil had fallen, and the waves lay perturbed and dreary beneath its influence. A cloud had suddenly come up and covered her horizon, and the polar star of hope fading mournfully from Heaven, left the needle of faith to quiver unsteadied mid an ocean of doubt.

"How can people be naughty?" began

Basil again. "I don't see, when they have the flowers to talk to them, and God to take care of them, and both to love."

"But, Basil, what do you mean about the flowers talking—do they talk to you?"

"Oh yes, always—all day long—oh they talk soft—soft unto my heart."

"How nice!"

"Nice, oh very! and, sister Conny, at night, when it is—oh quite, quite still, don't you hear the world speaking to God?"

"No, I don't—do you, darling?"

"Oh yes, I hear the sound of the angels' wings going up and down in the earth."

"Oh Basil, but that's the wind."

"Well I know, and then the trees, do look, sister Conny, don't they bend down their branches low?"

"Very low indeed, darling—why?"

"Why—don't you see—it is because they are, oh *so* glad that they bend down their heads lower and lower, to tell the earth angels are walking on it."

"What makes you think all these things, Basil?"

"Oh I don't know—let me tell you about the flowers."

"Well, darling."

"Why, when the angels are speaking to God up there, in the sky, sometimes a few words fall down to the earth you know, and then they take root in it, and grow up, and those are the flowers."

"Now you've hit it!" exclaimed Archie, who had come up unobserved, and heard Basil's last original remark—"Go it, young Hopeful! Great originality certainly about your theory of education! You've managed the flowers uncommon well—now for the stars."

"Oh, the stars, the stars once were flowers too," continued Basil, in his dreamy tone, quite innocent of his brother's raillery. "Only some of the flowers were naughty and wanted to have wings to fly straight up—up to God."

So God was very good to them, and took them up to be stars in the beautiful blue sky, quite close to Him, for ever more."

"An astronomical theory with a vengeance! Quite a new light upon the subject of transportation! So the Botany Bay of the Botanical Kingdom is Heaven! Oh the little rebels!" And gaily whistling, "Voi che sapete," Archie sauntered on laughing.

"I beg your pardon," said the voice of Edgar Villiers close at Constance's ear, "but do you find this grass rather too suggestive of cold to be either a safe or a pleasant seat?"

Constance started—"Oh no, I like it." Apparently Villiers did too, for he sat down by her, and began to talk, and then from out the clear blue of Heaven, there fell upon them both, like a flower gathered in Paradise, a golden hour, that linked together the uttered—and unuttered years of the Past and the Future, into one connected strain and one complete and perfect picture.

Then came a second summons from Mr. Conyngham. It is getting late, and they must soon be on the move. So the rest of the party coming in, in detachments, there was a little more disconnected talk, and then every one was ready to depart, with the exception of Archie, who was just getting into a state of delightful flirtation with one of the pink bonnets, *vice* Sydney, who had deserted his colours, and he was very desirous to know if she was to be at Lady Bowen's soir  e that was to "come off," Thursday fortnight; but before this could be satisfactorily settled, they were all hurried off into their respective carriages.

There can be no man so utterly desolate, who, when he counts o'er the tokens which the years now in their graves have left behind, does not find among them some "white days," standing forth pre-eminent in the long drawn out calendar of time; when he stood as it were on a pinnacle

of the temple, and beheld Life, and the glory of it.

Such had been that day to Constance. A giant force had been born into her soul, though she felt it not; the strength of a mighty love had risen on her life, though she knew it not. By its intuition she had looked through the veil of polished manners, and the light warfare of words, and read that Edgar Villiers was not true to himself.

With all the elements of a great and good man, he yet was neither one nor the other. And then there sprung up and budded in her heart of hearts, the wings of a strong-hearted love, destined to wrap him about in the mantle of a never-failing faith, till the worldlings had faded from his life, and the outer crusts of pride and circumstances had rent themselves away from his heart, for ever.

True—at present she was only conscious of a slight stirring of the waters of life, a

gentle trembling of the harp-strings of existence, and yet for her it was ordained that the dumb intercession of her prayer should ring forth above earth, and cleave the very Heavens, till her faith had accomplished that whereunto it was given—even to remove mountains.

to a high degree of the spirit of the thing
 I wish to say that I am not a person
 who is not to be taken into consideration
 and I am not a person who is not to be
 taken into consideration.

CHAPTER IX.

“ There I maddened!
 — Life swept through me into fever,
 And my soul sprang up astonish'd, sprang
 Full statured in an hour:
 Know you what it is when anguish with apocalyptic
 never
 To a Pythian height dilates, and despair sublimates to
 power?”

From my brain the soul wings budded.”

E. Barrett Browning.

“ WELL, ladies, who is going to-night ?”
 said Gerald, as he opened the door of the
 morning-room, where his sisters were assem-
 bled on the day of Lady Bowen's soirée,
 “ have you decided which of you are to
 honour Hawkmount this evening ?”

Neither Katherine nor Effie answered; for the one was too intent on her embroidery, and the other on her singing, and Constance was too deep in her book to hear.

Gerald repeated his question.

Effie threw down her music and started up —“ Oh I don't know—all of us, I suppose.”

“ No, it is impossible,” said Katherine coolly, looking up from her work one moment, then resuming it again—“ we cannot all go.”

“ Why not ?” exclaimed Effie.

“ Mamma is not well enough to go, so one must stay with her,” returned Katherine in the same tone.

“ Tiresome !” exclaimed Effie ; “ well, Katherine, then you must stay, I didn't go last time to Mrs. Percival's ball, and you did ; so I'm sure it is your turn to stay at home.”

“ And the time before that, who went ?” said Sydney, looking up from his book, as he sat by the fire.

"I did," answered Effie, "and so did Katherine."

"And the time before that?" said Sydney, in the same ironical tone—"and the time before that, and the time before that?"

Effie reddened—"How provoking you are, Sydney, you are always saying something disagreeable."

"Am I really—you surprise me! I'm sure I beg your pardon; I was only endeavouring to assist your memory, a mere act of charity, for I thought it required it."

"Well, you see you must decide, ladies, you must decide, or Lady Bowen will have the pleasure of none of your companies," Gerald cried.

Here Constance suddenly rose from her seat, and stopping another exclamation that was on Effie's lips, said quietly—"I am not going."

"Not going!" cried Effie in a tone of surprise, "well I really must say—I declare it is not your turn to remain at home."

“Don’t distress yourself about it, Effie,” said Sydney, “I can prescribe the remedy—stay at home yourself, and then Constance can go.”

“What nonsense you talk, Sydney! what use am I to mamma! I can’t get her sal-volatile, or things! Katherine should stay,” she said, looking rather sharply towards her eldest sister, who however appeared too intent on sorting shades, and counting stitches to hear her.

“It is to be a very grand smash, I hear,” said Gerald, with the last new word from the slang mint: “What a row there’ll be, every one jaw-jaw; when does the thing come off?”

“Oh at nine, or somewhere thereabouts: but we shall have to set off much earlier as it is some way off: but, Conny, don’t you really want to go?” said Effie, sorely divided between unwillingness to let her sister stay, and unwillingness to stay herself.

“How stupid of you, Effie!” cried Gerald,

in his complimentary school-boy fashion, "of course she does! I'm very glad they did not ask me though," he continued (it being a fox and grapes case) "I should say it was a horrid bore; however, I think Constance ought to go this time."

"No," interposed Constance, "don't say any more about it please, Gerald, I have quite made up my mind?"—"I don't care about it," she would have said, but a rising in her throat prevented it; she conquered, however, and said more cheerfully—"You know I never care so much as they do about it."

"Of course we all know that; Constance never does care, so she may just as well remain at home as not; so after all it is no such mighty sacrifice," said Katherine, in her short, sharp tone, and then she proceeded to gather up her work, considering it a settled thing, and left the room, saying, she must go and tell Morris to have her new dress ready by eight o'clock.

There is a certain heroism, a certain *éclat*, about some kinds of self-denial. Many a one has nerved himself up for one blighting hour of mortal agony, who yet chafes sorely beneath the petty crosses and little frets of everyday life. Many a one has not withheld his son, his only son, from the fire and the sacrifice, who yet keeps back part of the price of his lands, and thus spoils the whole pot of ointment with the one dead fly.

- Constance had made the offer to remain at home, half expecting it to be refused, or at least accepted as a great sacrifice. The poor little thing! She rather affected heroism; but when her sisters began to agree, that “really, after all, it was no great privation to her to stay at home, she never cared about it, &c.” she was surprised to find her heroic stilts giving way, and she herself growing most unheroically peevish. This feeling was not lessened when Effie, at the right time, appeared in the drawing-room, in all the glory of flowers and smiles.

“Well, Constance! I hope I do credit to the establishment,” she said, addressing her sister, and at the same time kissing her—“there, good night! I will say this for you, you are very good-natured—you really are a great darling!”

But Constance disengaged herself, with—“Oh how you hurt me, Effie!” and Effie, without answering, swept down the stairs.

“Good night, Cinderella!” cried Archie from the bottom of the stairs, “don’t set fire either to yourself or the house while we are away, as it would be awkward for all parties.”

Euphemia was still busy, cloaking her white silk, when Constance came running down—“Oh I am so glad you are not gone! Effie, I have brought you my fan, yours looks so old and shabby. Good night, dear, I do so hope you will enjoy yourself.”

It was a long drive rather, and Mr. Conyngham was always very particular

about being in time, which of course meant 'out of time,' as they generally arrived a whole quarter of an hour before any one else, while the smell of lamp-lighting, and coffee-making sensibly pervaded the house.

They got into the carriage, it drove off, and then Constance walked slowly up stairs. She was met on the way by a message from her mother : "She would be glad to see Miss Constance," the lady's-maid said, and Constance went to her mother's room, but her step was slow and heavy.

Mrs. Conyngham was not decidedly ill, that is not vulgarly so. She knew nothing about agues ; entirely disowned headaches ; fevers she considered horrid things ; colds, common things ; and regular illnesses, vulgar things. A slight indisposition on the contrary, is lady-like and interesting ; so Mrs. Conyngham, by dint of lying on the sofa, and rarely going out, had at last successfully achieved a state of *petite santé*,

which always kept her on the tip-toe of sympathy for herself, to the comfort of her doctor, and the discomfort of every one else.

"Oh is it you, Constance," she said in the sotto voice sick-room tone, as her daughter came in, "I thought you were never coming."

"They have only just gone, mamma; the carriage drove off a minute ago."

"My dear, pray speak a little lower; you forget how little my head will bear," said Mrs. Conyngham.

"Shall I get you a little jelly, mamma?" said Constance, subduing her voice, already low enough by nature, into the conventual whisper.

No, Mrs. Conyngham would not have any jelly, she was tired of jelly. Was there no blanc-mange in the house?—Yes, certainly there was, but Mrs. Conyngham had anathematized the whole genus of creams and blanc-manges only the day before—but Constance

did not remind her of this, and went to order some.

She had hardly left the room when her mother called her back—"No, she would not have any blanc-mange—was there nothing else?"

Constance proposed "Arrowroot?"

"Oh dear no!"

"Sago?"

"Worse still."

"Chocolate?"

"Well, was there any?"

She would see. The chocolate was made, and brought up. First it was too thin; there was not sugar enough. Oh, now there was too much,—and pushing it all away, Mrs. Conyngham gave way to a fit of childish tears, the effect of weakness.—Constance tried caressing and soothing, and at last proposed reading, hoping so to lull her to sleep.

"Very well," said her mother, giving a languid assent, "only don't let it be too ex-

citing, my nerves won't bear it," she continued, putting her hand to her head with an exquisite look of self-compassion.

Constance took up a volume of sermons—"I wonder whether this will do," she thought, "at least it won't be very exciting." She had scarcely read three lines, when Mrs. Conyngham looked up, with

"My dear, what *are* you reading, sermons! how thoughtless of you; my head won't bear that sort of thing. There! do you see that book—no, not that one—the one next it, with the leather back—yes: now you may read this if you like. Begin where I left off, my mark is in the place."

Constance gave a glance of despair at the book—it was a sickly last class sentimental novel, constructed on strictly orthodox principles, beginning with the indispensable three volumes—by name "Amelinda."

The story consisted of the usual circumstances. The heroine, who every body knows

is to marry the hero, being doomed to marry somebody else, who every one knows she is *not* to marry—is separated from the lord of her heart by a course of cruel and conflicting occurrences, after the Scylla and Charybdis manner, and is finally concealed in a secret dungeon for the express purpose of being found again : to accomplish which pious intent, the whole grand machinery of the piece is then set in motion. Through the kind assistance of the hard-hearted guardian, who seems to appear for the express purpose of being scape-goat for the whole party, the hero goes through an unprecedented series of the most awful adventures, any one of which would have sufficed to kill any reasonable individual, till the wretched man having at last safely escaped two duels, one assassination, a burning, a shipwreck, and a storm, is finally allowed to turn up exactly at the right moment, just as the lady of his choice is being united to the gentleman of some-

body's else. Of course, the latter, to oblige all parties, has the consideration to die at that precise moment; and the hero, without further ado, steps into his place, and marries the heroine with the usual concomitant circumstances of a splendid dejeuner, titled guests, wedding favours, and a blaze of happiness inclusive!

There was no resource but to read it, so Constance began from where her mother left off:—

"The lady Amelinda passed on, rivalling the night in beauty, till the dimmed moon veiled her face for very shame, her eyes beaming like twin stars that had left their station in Heaven kindled into brightness the murky mantle of darkness—it seemed as though the graces had made her form their home, and borrowed there a shrine and tabernacle for the worship of themselves, nature shrunk abashed before this vision of loveliness, and bowed for once before a fairer image than herself."

“What egregious folly!” thought Constance, as she laid down the book: “Mamma,” she said aloud, “will that be enough?”

“Enough, my dear; you have only just begun. Why do you stop, you quite spoil that beautiful passage.”

Constance went on, but her thoughts within wove themselves into a murmur of discord, “How tiresome to have to spend my time on such nonsense, when I have so many things to do. My new song is not nearly perfect yet.”—Then her drawing of the mill, and the little girl looking at the donkey, and the donkey looking at nothing in particular! and besides that, there lay her Dante, tantalizing before her with the mark in the last page of the “Inferno”—then a sigh came, and with it the feeling that somehow she felt dull and miserable, and not at all inclined to read “Amelinda.”

“You are tired, my dear,” at last said Mrs. Conyngham, as Constance’s manner

grew more and more dreamy, and the words came out as if a ten pound weight of lead were attached to each of them, "leave off when you like."

Constance caught at the words, rather than the spirit. "Will that do, mamma?" and receiving a languid assent, having satisfied her conscience by repeating the question—set the table to rights, shook up the pillows, and then said, "I am going down to practise, mamma, if you want me will you send for me." Down she went to the library, but her busy fit passed when she entered it, for though she opened the piano-forte, and got out her music, neither were used, for she sat down before the fire instead, and fell into a reverie. "I wonder what Katherine and they all are about now—psha. How silly of me, I thought I didn't care to go, but I suppose I do though—I feel very dull and stupid. I wonder whether Mr. Villiers will be there. I hope not—

pooh ! Nonsense ! What am I saying—come ! I must get up and not be so idle.”

She took up her pencil, but drawing was dreamy work, and she soon found herself wandering again into thought. “I suppose it is a large party—I wonder whether any one will miss me—if Mr. Villiers is there, I wonder will he ask where I am. I promised too to sing to him next time the song he is so fond of ; well, well, I can sing it some other day, only I should have liked to thank him for the books he sent me yesterday, however.—Oh ! there is ten o’clock, and I promised to read to Basil, I don’t know how long ago,” and jumping up she huddled away her books, and leaving the room in pitiable confusion ran up stairs.

At the end of a long passage in the east wing of Balcombe priory, was situated a room which, by courtesy, was still called the nursery. In this room sat little Basil, on a stool at the feet of his nurse, who

reclined back in an arm-chair. As Constance opened the door she heard him say, "There, nurse dear, is your head better? I've told you all 'Rus in boots,' and all 'Cinderella,' shall I tell you all the 'White Cat' too?" "Why, Basil," said Constance, coming forward, "not in bed, do you know, what o'clock it is?" "Oh, yes," said the child, putting his fingers on his lips, "Nurse has such a headache. I heard it strike, and I counted all the strokes, but I wouldn't disturb poor nurse; it don't hurt a big strong man like me to sit up a little bit you know."

"I'm so sorry I forgot to come and read to you, as I promised, darling," said Constance, with a shade of compunction, "but I've brought you some sugar-plums."

"Big almond ones! oh, how nice!"

"Well, eat them then! Why don't you?" she said, as she watched Basil carefully folding them up in paper.

"Oh, poor nurse—not well—I'll keep them for her, when she wakes, I do think she is asleep now."

"Bless me," said the nurse starting up, and rubbing her eyes, and at the same time throwing down a layer of pillows—"Why sure! I've been half asleep like."

"Three, four, five," said Constance, picking up the pillows. "Well, nurse; you were well supported!"

"Bless my soul! and who put them there I wonder."

"Me, nurse," said Basil, in a deprecating tone, "I thought it would do your head good."

A feeling of shame came upon Constance; his unselfishness for others, her selfishness for herself; he with his one talent, she with her ten—and which had put them out to the highest rate of interest! A quarter of an hour after, and Constance was again seated by her mother's couch, deep in the mysteries of "Amelinda."

"Well, upon my word, Constance, not in bed yet!" cried Effie, on her return, as she peeped into her sister's room and found her still up; "why the cocks are already getting up a crow!"

"Oh I wanted to hear all about the party, I could not go to bed till I had."

"Ye powers!" said Effie, with a light-hearted laugh as she came further in, daintily holding up her dress, lest the floor should soil it. "My dear philosopher, how came *you* to be so curious? Well! well! wonders will never cease."

"Come, tell me, what did you do! were you amused! who did you see?"

"Why as to seeing, there was the usual amount of well preserved dowager mummies, and young officers, just for all the world like scarlet runners run to seed, besides a few old ones, who seemed afflicted with dumbness, for they never opened their lips that I could see."

“What a remarkably lively party! and what was the amusement, to sit round in a circle and look at one another?”

“Why, I believe, some one tried to sing up in the corner, at least there was a rumour of the kind going about; then a gentleman took up a flute, and endeavoured to blow something out of it, but it wouldn’t come.”

“How exciting!”

“Yes, isn’t it ridiculous of people to ask one out to be bored! I declare it makes one feel a downright fool!”

“Why, it has quite destroyed your equanimity, Effie.”

“And enough to do it too! You should have heard Archie, as we came home, how he held forth on the ‘bore’ of these parties. I think he wished Lady Bowen at the bottom of the sea!—why you know we all expected ‘something’ from the length of the invitation, and all to result in ‘nothing,’ it was too bad? however, there

were one or two very pretty toilettes, so as I had nothing else to do I learnt them by heart," and Effie proceeded to describe them, while her sister grew abstracted in manner, and her eyes grew busy in tracing out forms and figures in the dying embers of the fire.

"Oh, by-the-bye, I forgot to tell you," continued Effie, "about Mr. Villiers."

Constance's head was suddenly lifted up, her cheeks deepened into a bright colour, and her eyes left off tracing forms and figures in the fire. Then he was there! the question had been all along on her lips, but for some reason it had not been asked. Effie went on—"He was the only thing that made the whole party at all tolerable, quite an oasis in the desert! What was I going to say? Oh I know, it was about my bouquet—He said to me, 'what a very tastefully arranged bouquet that is of yours, Miss Conyngham:' and do you know what I told him? that he

could know nothing about the matter, as he was no judge! Wasn't that impertinent? Well, don't look quite so like a clap of thunder; it isn't a deadly sin after all: besides he is such a dear delightful grandioso! He looks as if he never could do anything like other people, that I particularly enjoy teasing him a bit."

"Teasing!" echoed Constance, "teasing him!" as if the very idea of Effie teasing so grand a personage as Mr. Villiers was too preposterous.

"Well, don't go mad with astonishment upon it, though by-the-bye isn't he—what is it that Archie calls him—a 'rara-avis' of yours?"

"Of mine! no, indeed, I think it is you who are always praising him," said Constance with a start and then blushing; "what should I care about him?" she continued, with more eagerness than the subject required. (Is it not he who feels himself to be

guilty who is most anxious to prove himself not so ?)

“ Well, don’t go into fits about it, my dear, pray compose yourself ! I was merely going to observe, that when Mr. Villiers opens his mouth, you expect nothing less than an oration to follow ; in fact I quite pity him, that he must say ‘ how d’ye do,’ and ‘ good bye’ like common people.”

“ Tell him so then, and perhaps to please you, he will say it one day in Greek, and the next in Latin.”

“ Oh I wish he would,” cried Effie, jumping up and down in her chair.

“ And instead of saying ‘ the weather is fine,’ or ‘ the day is hot,’ like other people, he might remark, ‘ that the atmosphere was wonderfully serene,’ and ‘ the day remarkable for its dissolving properties !’ ”

“ Oh capital, Constance, I’ll tell him !— but by the way, I didn’t finish my story about the bouquet ; well, he was *so* good—

tempered, even after I told him he didn't know anything about it; what do you think he did? eh?"

"Do? I don't know—how should I know," returned Constance, pushing back her chair.

"Why he only said, so courteously, 'Does Miss Conyngham think so? then she must allow me to try and redeem my character,' and away he went, to the conservatory I suppose, and presently he came back with the most lovely camellia you ever saw; (I hope Lady Bowen didn't mind, but they are such old friends, I dare say she didn't.) He gave it to me, and what do you think he said—'This is my favourite flower, Miss Conyngham, is it not in very bad taste?' Wasn't it like him, eh? wasn't it, Constance, why don't you answer?"

"Yes," she answered, in a constrained voice; but she didn't look up, and with an exclamation at the apparently fast increasing heat of the fire, got up, and moved away.

"Oh I do like him so!" continued Effie, "don't you? He is so different from every body else. I'm so tired of being asked at parties—whether I've been to many balls this season, and whether I like dancing. Now Mr. Villiers never does that; he does never quite run the weather to death for want of a better subject in conversation, as other people do, but—"

The two sisters were standing before a pier-glass in which the forms of both were reflected; Constance threw one glance towards it, and took in the outline of both. The one, with the snow white drapery flowing round the graceful childish figure—the fair cherub face, with its cloud of golden wavy hair gathering as a beam of sunshine about the rosy cheek, and dimpled chin—the sparkling eye, blue as the very heavens in their brightness, and the brow, glorious with all "the cloudless æther of a maiden's life": the other, a pale, unanimated countenance over-

shadowed with straight dark hair, with large sunken eyes that gradually filled with tears, till a mist slowly gathered over them—and the vision was blotted out.

“Conny, don’t you think him almost, I mean quite handsome?—why don’t you answer, Constance? Constance, are you dreaming!” exclaimed Effie, impatiently touching her.

“Eh? what did you say—yes—no—I don’t know.”

“Well, if you are so stupid I shall go; it is no use my staying here if you won’t talk to me,” returned Effie, “good night!”

It was a strange embrace that night, for Constance’s arms were thrown tightly round her beautiful sister, and she held her closely, and looked again and again into her pretty face—“Take all,” she murmured unconsciously half aloud, “you are more worthy of it than I.”

“Take what? why, Constance, you are

half asleep, I think ; take your own wits back by to-morrow morning, and that is all the taking there is in the case ; good night— Oh they played such a pet of a valse,” and humming the tune, Effie left the room.

That night in Balcombe Priory, a light might be seen steadily burning in one of its upper chamber windows, illumining with its single tongue of flame, the long range of ~~the darkened house. The lights and shadows~~ came and went upon the ~~lawn outside;~~ the trees whispered together into the ears of night, and the moon, as it wandered forth from the folds of a great white cloud, looked into the little room, and fell gently upon a kneeling form, on whose uplifted brow the agony of a present struggle and a future trial were glassed in legible characters of woe. Alas ! a sigh, a word, nay less, “the cadence of a word,” will oft-times suffice to rend the shadowy veil of days and months, and blazon forth into the ear of truth the

secrets of the heart, and the mysteries of life. A few idle syllables, and the mists of a long undeciphered past rose up, and floated away from before them, as the early dew from beneath the love-fraught kisses of the ascending sun. Constance's heart lay bared to her own frightened and awe-struck gaze. Yes, she loved him; loved him with a love commensurate with life—strong as death, and infinite as eternity.

CHAPTER X.

Like the swell of some sweet tune,
 Morning rises into noon,
 May glides onward into June.

Bear through sorrow, wrong, and pain,
 In thy heart the dew of youth,
 On thy lips the smile of truth.

And that smile, like sunshine, dart
 Into many a sunless heart,
 For a smile of God thou art."—*Longfellow.*

TIME passed on ; that time that passes on for all ; for some on leaden wheels, for others on fairy wings ; for both with a never retrograding, ever advancing tread. Again had spring shaken out her flowers into the lap of summer ; summer had had her day of burn-

ing clearness, and autumn had laid by her robes of glory, and gone to sleep again beneath the folded wings of winter. Still within Balcombe all the wheels of life kept turning on the same—breakfast, luncheon, dinner, that routine that never alters, though hearts be broken, and our loved ones hid in the shadow of the tomb. But to one amongst the number that made up the family circle, life had suddenly grown into a great reality.

Constance Conyngham was startled into womanhood before she well knew she had left childhood. Ah Constance! poor Constance, where were now all your high-flown aspirations? You who had longed for a kingdom to rule, did you find it so very easy to rule even your own spirit? You who had murmured that you did nothing, surely you had work enough now given you to do? She had longed for more excitement in her life, and God gave her the excitement of sorrow. Who shall judge of God's ways with men? The im-

petuous spirit that chafes like a war-horse for the battle; He mounts as guard over the baggage waggons of patience; and the trembling soul, that faints before the west wind, He sends forth as a standard-bearer to the van of the army to bear the whole brunt of the storm. Constance became a busy, useful woman, instead of a dreaming, idle girl. The two children she had begun with in the way of teaching, proved an earnest of the schools which her mother finding out at last it was not such an unusual thing after all for young ladies to do, allowed her to frequent. Then there rose other aids that came to her. Her sisters at first remarked how punctual she always was in her attendance at church, but at last got too accustomed to it to remark about it, and her mother, really kind, though with no judgment of her own, when she found that religion was aristocratically popular, and church-going becoming the fashion, did

not object to her daughter doing the very same thing that the Lady Cecílias and Clementinas, were doing at that very same moment in Belgrave and Grosvenor Squares.

Since that night when the secret history of her own heart had been deciphered for her, Constance Conyngham and Edgar Villiers had never met. His father having fallen dangerously ill on the Continent, whither he had gone with his daughters, an express had been sent to his son, who had left immediately, and still continued with him in Italy. In the meantime with the change that had passed upon Constance's life, a change had come upon her character and her face; a quiet look of pain and patience had settled down upon her; while the eyes that looked across the intervening veil of months grew dim with tears in the yearning longing for the absent one's return. Yet ever beneath the full pulses of life, there sounded clear and still the under-

chime of the soft whisper of another's love, and Hope, gathering out the flowers of life, laid them as a wreath of peace on her heart.

It was Christmas, and the young people of the Conyngham household were in full hue and cry, after a Christmas party. Mr. Conyngham had at first absolutely refused any thing of the kind, but at last succumbing to the besieging efforts of Katherine and Effie, agreed to a half and half thing—a kind of overgrown child's party, which Archie voted—a horrid bore! As each day passed on, each day seemed to add a deeper shade to the gloom on Mr. Conyngham's brow, and caused his manner to grow more irritable and abstracted. It was a dull Christmas that year, every one felt it to be so, though they knew not why—but a cloud seemed hanging over hearth and home, and unconsciously many a look was upturned towards it, to see when it would break, and how and where.

"Heigho," sighed Constance, as she put the last finishing touches to her dress, preparatory to going down to the company on the child-party night. "I wish it were over!—parties are very dull things now! I didn't think so always though—well! well!—I must be patient. 'Abide thou the Lord's leisure, be strong, and He shall comfort thy heart.'—Yes—yes, I will try. Oh there is Gerald calling me. Why, how pale I look, it doesn't matter though, there is no one to see me to-night, that I care—Oh there's Gerald calling me again!"

"Make haste!" exclaimed Gerald, from the foot of the stairs. "The Tyrrills, and the Jamiesons have come, and there's Lady Bowen's carriage turning up the avenue—*do* make haste—what a time you girls are beautifying yourselves. — Oh there comes Katherine—my eyes, isn't she splash!"

"Do be quiet, Gerald," said Katherine, as her brother proceeded to cut a caper expres-

airs of admiration. "Constance, stop a moment, you don't know what a figure you are: did you put your things on with a pitch-fork?"

"Oh, please don't," began Constance, as her sister proceeded to administer a poke here, and a poke there, which she called 'setting to rights.'

"Oh bother, she'll do very well—do come along," said Gerald.

Here Effie came flying down the stairs, and alighted with a pirouette at her brother's feet.

"Look at me, Gerald, am I not irresistible?"

"Pooh!"

"You hard-hearted monster, but I am though for all. I declare I have quite fallen in love with myself—now philosopher," she said, turning to Constance, and performing a low curtsy before her, "say the truth, don't I look very nice?"

"My dear Effie, how can you be so absurd?"

"Very easily, I can assure you."

"How long are you going to jaw there?" interrupted Gerald, "here, come along, Ef!" and seizing her arm he dragged her after him down the passage laughing, and protesting at such energetic measures, while Katherine and Constance followed more soberly.

There were plenty of Christmas games that evening, and a kind of victimization went on of the elder, by the juvenile part of the company, who would be content with nothing less than hunting a slipper they never could find, besides manifesting a strong partiality for tumbling down, which uniformly brought out a latent disposition to cry.

"Come, come!" cried Gerald at last, "I vote we've had enough of this fun—here, Katherine, I say, go, and play us a valse, like a good girl."

"Thank you—I don't play vales."

"What a bore!—Where's Constance? Oh, she's out there! Effie, you'll do, come strike up! Hello there, you people! get partners, will you?"

"Well, Conny, why aren't you tripping it too," said Archie, coming up to where Constance stood alone near the door of the conservatory.

"Oh, I'm not wanted."

"Which means you are not asked, I suppose. Ha! 'by the pricking of my thumb, something wicked this way comes!' I hear carriage wheels—new arrivals, I suppose, come one day after the fair! Why 'pon my word if it isn't—Ha, Villiers!" Constance turned round, and beheld Edgar Villiers standing before her, and the next moment she felt the close clasp of his hand on hers.

"Why, my dear fellow," exclaimed Archie, as his turn came, and shaking his hand as

if it was a bell rope, "Where did you turn up from? I thought you were in Rome."

"I have not long returned, my father being so much better, I ventured to take a little run over to England, but I must apologize," he said, turning to Constance, "for my presence here to-night. I did not know you were engaged this evening."

"Don't mention it, my dear fellow, pray," interrupted Archie, "we are only too delighted to see you. Your father better? faith! I'm glad to hear it; and how are you? not tired yet of having your eyes in a fine frenzy rolling over fusty, musty pictures - by George it must be a horrid bore!"

"No, the worst part is," said Villiers smiling, "that it is so easy in these days to travel on paper that nothing has the charm of novelty."

"Oh!" exclaimed Constance.

"Why I mean I was always fancying I had seen the places before, till I remembered

it was only in so and so, 'Wanderings in Italy,' or 'Gleanings in Germany,' or 'pickings up' somewhere else."

"Well, all books of travels seem to me alike," said Archie, "extatics at Mont Blanc, heroics at Rome, and hysterics over Athens, if one's very lucky a simoon in the desert, and if one isn't, only the chance of being choked with sand, or dying of thirst; then a dip in the Dead Sea, from which you come forth a pillar of salt, and to crown all, the remarkable privilege of sleeping in already inhabited beds. Hang it! for the life of me, I don't see the fun of travelling!"

They both laughed, and Constance said, "Why, Archie, unless you could be followed about by a waggon containing your arm-chair and sofa, you wouldn't do to travel at all!"

"There, Conyngham, hide your diminished head, and never set up for a traveller!"

"Not I!—trust me—don't intend to. Give

me dear old England, and all its fog ; better ten thousand times than your gim-crack foreign holes."

"Barring the fog."

"No, not barring anything ; the more fog I swallow the more patriotic I feel !"

"Or the more asthmatic, which ?"

"Speak for yourself, man ; but come astonish our weak minds, and give us a report of your travels."

"Oh you know there is an orthodox set of feelings for every remarkable place, and old 'Murray' tells you so minutely where you are to be astounded, where enchanted, and where transported, that really he leaves you very little to do."

"Well, I can't stand that kind of humbug."

"Well, I don't know ; at last I began rather to like always having a set of feelings cut and dry ready to hand, without the trouble of looking them up."

"Oh did you ! how could you ?" said Constance.

“Indeed, Miss Conyngham, if you knew the wear and tear of mind it saved me; we had an English family for our fellow travellers; and as the papa and mamma and the six daughters were always coming down upon me, for my views upon the state of things in general, I got up ‘Murray,’ and re-edited it in my own words for their edification.”

“I say though, that was a little too bad,” cried Archie, “didn’t they find out you were gammoning them?”

“I never asked them, so I really don’t know.”

“Well you’re a pretty fellow! I call that cool anyhow! But talking of novelty, I dare say now Sunday doings, church and all that will seem pretty new to you; little of that abroad, eh!”

“So little that I have had time almost to forget the inside of a church; at Rome there is only a room outside, somewhere or other.”

"How you must have missed it!" said Constance. Villiers looked a little puzzled for an answer, then said in an indifferent tone, "Oh of course; but in fact one needs no church in Italy, art is religion there, and religion is art, and that in more senses than one," he added smiling half satirically.

"Haven't turned infidel, or any little thing of that sort, I suppose?" said Archie. "Oh bother! they are playing the Lancers, and I'm engaged for them! if I don't look sharp my disconsolate partner will be consoling herself with somebody else;"—and away rushed Archie.

Villiers and Constance were left alone; a change came over Edgar, his careless *laissez-aller*-kind of air altered entirely, and Constance felt his eyes looking through and through into her heart, till it called up a bright sunshine there, which stole up softly into her countenance, till the pitying eye-lashes veiled the happy light from his view.



She knew nothing, felt nothing, but that he had returned, and that he loved her. The Past was forgotten, the long weary waiting and the patient pain ; and the Present weaving itself into the tissue of her life, caught up the throb of each separate thought, and re-uttered itself in song. On went the dancers like a crowd of drooping lilies, and as the prelude of a brilliant waltz sounded out upon the night, it blended with the silent music of her heart within, and the sense of re-echoed love passed like a strain of music into her life. All on a sudden the playing within stopped, there was a dead lull for a moment, then the sound of hurried steps, smothered voices, and a bustle outside in the hall. Edgar left a sentence unfinished he was saying to Constance, and turned hurriedly round, she glanced up at him and read a look on his face, that made her spring forwards and unconsciously grasp his arm.

"What is it? tell me," she said gasping.

"I don't know, pray be calm," and his voice trembled with intense emotion; "stay here, I implore you, Constance, dearest!" and he hastily left her.

Even at that moment, loud above the noise and tumult outside, pierced the tenderness of that one word "Constance," and in her heart its echoes rang from that day hence for evermore. She stood still one instant; the strong beating of her heart sending the blood in crimson tides to her brow and throat: then with an effort she struggled down the joy into silence, and followed Edgar Villiers out of the room. She gained the door, a crowd of people were standing round it, and on the faces of all were gathered fear and darkness; they divided a moment, and she saw her father lying stretched motionless on the floor, while the gas light in the hall glared luridly on his rigid face. Archie was trying to raise him, Mrs. Conyngham stood by,

wringing her hands, Katherine was in a stupor of grief and amazement, while Effie hung over him crying. One instant Constance stopped, her brain reeled, the room swam round and round, and her knees tottered under her. She heard Archie ask in a hurried voice, "Has Dr. Cowan been sent for?" No one knew; "Go, go, why do you stay?" he cried almost impatiently.

Some one rushed through the corridor, and the next moment Edgar Villiers was galloping as fast as the horse's feet would carry him down the avenue.

Every thing was done that could be done. Mr. Conyngham was laid still senseless on his bed, and till the doctor came, the only resource was patience. Oh, would he never come! Two, three, four struck, and still he lay insensible, and still he had not come; the curtains were drawn across the window, and the darkness of the room rendered only more visible by the faint glimmer of the little lamp that kept flickering to and

fro, casting strange patterns on the floor. The deep ticking of the clock on the stairs was the only sound that broke the silence, for Time seemed to beat almost audibly, and its every pulsation vibrated on the heart. Oh, who can tell, save those who have watched by the death-beds of their loved ones, the drear palsy that passes over the soul, when the "hope deferred that maketh the heart sick," settles down into the certainty of despair!

At length, through the closed shutters and up into the very death-chamber, came sounding the lifeful echo of horse's hoofs; Constance was the first to hear it, creeping out of the room along the landing that gave back distinctly the echo of her tread, she opened a window and looked out to see if she could discern the doctor's approach. It was still dark, a few silver stars twinkled quietly in the deep blue sky, and as the fresh, joyous, though frosty morning air,

came laughing by, it lifted the hair from the pale brow of the watcher, then danced on again with its full song of life.

But its touch had stolen the strength from her heart, for like a living flower on a dead corpse, it came mocking with its fulness of life, the dread and the feebleness of death; she shut the window hastily, and pale and trembling crept down the stairs. She passed the room, empty now, a few hours ago resounding with the voice of mirth, and bright with the glance of beauty, the deserted seats, the faint glimmer of the candles as still unextinguished they sank lower and lower in their sockets, the faded wreaths of evergreens that to her feverish fancy seemed shaping themselves into funereal feathers; the dead silence all told how the shadow of death had been suddenly, without an instant's warning, cast on the hearth of life.

All at once, some one stood before her,

as if coming out of vacancy. In her excited state she could have shrieked, but she knew the voice of Edgar Villiers.

"Miss Conyngham!—how foolish of me! I startled you," he said in his strangely low and tender accents, "but I could not go away till I heard a better account of—of your father, and I was just coming to tell you Dr. Cowan is here."

"Thank God!" murmured Constance, and she burst into tears. Villiers gently drew her arm within his, and placed her on a seat and let her cry as the kindest thing he could do. At last Constance looked up and said simply, "Thank you, you are very kind; I will go back to papa: it is very silly of me I know."

She got up, but she trembled so, that Villiers insisted on her taking his arm, and he would not leave her till he saw her safe to the door of the sick room.

That night, long after when the doctor had

pronounced Mr. Conyngham decidedly better, and most of the family had retired to seek a few hours' repose, Constance still heard the sound of his measured tread walking to and fro in the deserted ball room.

CHAPTER XI.

Ador.—"Do we love not?"

Zerah.—

"Yea

But not as man shall ; not with life for death,
Now thrilling through the startled being,
Not with strange astonished smiles that ever may
Gush passionate with tears, and fill their

Eliz. Barrett Browning.

"———Our thoughts

Tend ever on and rest not in the Present ;
As drops of rain fall into some dark well,
And from below comes a scarce audible sound,
So fall our thoughts into the dark Hereafter,
And their mysterious echo reaches us."

Longfellow.

THE storm passed over, and did not burst.
Mr. Conyngham was pronounced convalescent,
but the still calm that usually falls,

like the waving of angels' wings, upon the home from whence the shadow of Death has come and gone again did not seem to descend upon Balcombe Priory. Mr. Conyngham was better it was true; but the doctors said he would be a confirmed invalid for the rest of his life, from the effects of his illness, which was a paralytic stroke. He was able now to sit up a little, but evidently there was some weight upon his mind, for though his speech was not affected, he seldom spoke, and generally remained passive and motionless, heaving sighs that almost amounted to groans. Sydney was absent at the time, but his return was daily expected, and his father seemed to look forward to that with almost feverish eagerness. In the meantime, Mrs. Conyngham had nearly worried herself ill, too; so her daughters had enough to do in the way of nursing; while Archie looked disconsolate, and made manifold offers of service, but as they only

consisted in walking about from room to room he didn't do much good, except to his own muscles. Edgar Villiers, however, was always at hand. Every day regularly he walked over to the Priory, ready to do or go anywhere, where he could be of use.

"Good morning, Constance," said Archie to his sister, as she appeared at the breakfast table one morning early in spring; "how are both our respected parents to-day?"

"Oh, papa seems quite comfortable; had a very good night; and mamma will come down after breakfast. Oh now you are up, please, Archie, ring the bell?"

"Bother! what for?"

"For Morris to take up Katherine's breakfast."

"Now, 'pon my honour, if that isn't too bad! I never saw anything like you young ladies; as soon as anything happens, you resort to your rooms and put on your night caps, as if misfortune could only be properly

met in a dressing gown and slippers ! I declare I've no patience with Katherine ! and Effie too ; is she also rehearsing how to sit on a monument smiling at grief ?"

"How absurd you are, Archie ! she has a head-ache, and is late this morning."

"Oh, of course."

"Now, come, Archie," said Constance smiling, "it's all very fine, but we all know what men are, when they have only a finger ache."

"Why, horrid bores to be sure ; but 'Oh ye gods and goddesses !' if there isn't that worthy squire of dames, Edgar Villiers, coming up the avenue."

Constance applied herself to the cups and saucers, while Archie, going to the window, began a running commentary on Mr. Villiers, as he came walking up the avenue.

"I say, Constance."

"Well !"

"That fellow deserves a medal from the Humane Society, doesn't he ?"

“A what?”

“A medal—his attentions to the sick and infirm are so unremitted—let me see—Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, he was here to breakfast, and again to-day. I shall begin to consider him as much a *sine-qua-non* at the breakfast table as the urn itself.”

“Do be quiet, Archie, he will hear you.”

“Not unless he is privately furnished with a hearing trumpet : by the way, Constance,” said Archie, suddenly wheeling round, “don’t you think the fellow is a good deal altered?”

“Altered !—how ?—why ?” replied Constance, suddenly paying a very devout attention to the tea cups.

“Only his ideas seem to have acquired an amount of latitude and longitude, even beyond what I can stand.”

“How !” said Constance starting, “What do you mean ?”

“Don’t be scandalized ; I only mean that

living abroad seems to have disembarrassed his creed of a few troublesome angles."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Nothing, beyond that his seat at Church is as often vacant as filled—however—Oh mercy on me!—here he comes—hem—I must compose my face, there! Now do I look proper? Ha, Villiers!"

"Good morning," said the unconscious object of the foregoing remarks, as he opened the breakfast room door; "a good bulletin of your patient I hope to-day, Miss Conyng-ham."

"Thank you, papa is very much better; may I give you some coffee?"

"Better have some, Villiers, for if you don't the only alternative I can offer you is water; as I can never get any one to trust me with the keys of the cellar."

"It is thought dangerous, I suppose."

"Now, I call that a downright libel; I declare, I've a good mind to order pistols for two in the next room."

“Pistols for one will do ; for not even the pleasure of being shot at, will make me give up my present seat.”

“Glad you are so comfortable, wish I was so too ; ’pon my life I shan’t be sorry when I begin work with Messrs. Dryasdust and Doembrown.”

Archie was to begin life under the auspices of those celebrated lawyers ; there having been an interregnum of about a year between that and his last experience of college, before he could make up his mind to any profession, or any work in life whatsoever.

“That felicity will not be long denied you, I presume, Conyngham.”

“Not long ; and hang it, it is so awfully slow here, that I don’t know I shan’t quite enjoy the change.”

“And you really have the intention of studying?”

“Meaning, that you don’t think I can—civil certainly.”

“For can, read will.”

"Isn't so jolly as bagging partridges to be sure."

"Bag Coke and Littleton instead."

"Too heavy for my bag altogether."

"But after all, Archie," said Constance, thinking she ought to take some part in the conversation, and in consequence making a not very wise remark, "I don't see any fun in shooting."

"Very likely not; neither do I in crochet."

"Your sister looks at it from a philosophical point of view, I suppose," said Edgar, "do you remember what Pascal says about hunting, which also applies to shooting?"

"Not I," said Archie, applying himself to the ham.

"Qu'on est peu raisonnable à passer tout le jour à courir après un lièvre qu'on ne foudrait pas avoir acheté."

"Then why do people do it?" exclaimed Constance.

"As a means for getting rid of time," replied Edgar.

"Oh that Pascal, he was a queer old fish!" muttered Archie to himself, as he laid in a great stock of hot roll and butter.

"The great aim of life is to kill time as quickly as possible you know, Miss Conyng-ham."

To which Miss Conyngnam only replied "Oh."

"Give me your receipt for doing it, Villiers, and I'll apply it on the next opportunity," cried Archie.

"I have none, I wish I had!"

"By George, so do I!"

"Sometimes I give him a gentle hit with a billiard cue."

"And sometimes you lie in bed all Sunday morning, for the same purpose I suppose," continued Archie.

Edgar reddened, and then tried to laugh off his annoyance with, "You speak from experience I imagine."

"Oh that beats all! as if I wasn't a pattern to the whole parish."

"Well you've no excuse for not going to church."

"Have not I! — what's the row with you?"

"Why you've a very fair clergyman, whereas we are doomed to Stoke Church, and old Snell."

"But he is a very good old man, isn't he?" said Constance, looking rather shocked.

"Excellent,—but his sermons have the peculiarity of always acting upon me as a soporific."

"I shouldn't call that a peculiarity," said Archie, and they both laughed, while Constance looked still more distressed.

"I wouldn't care," continued Villiers, "if he would only sometimes be new; but it's always the same burthen. 'We ought to be good, because it's very wrong to be bad.'"

"Are the sermons his own? perhaps he cribs," suggested Archie.

"I should say the internal evidence is strong that he doesn't."

"Possibly you wish he did."

"Yes, there might be some chance of his stumbling on a new idea then."

"Perhaps you stumble over those that are there already," said Constance.

"I am quite ready to confess it, Miss Conyngham," replied Edgar, turning to her, with a glance that brought the colour to her cheek, and made the eye-lashes go down; "but don't condemn me quite, if I do own, that though, of course, it's all very good, it's oh, very stupid!"

"Precious slow!" soliloquized Archie.

"If it were not all in the 'Johnnie be a good boy, and he shall have a sugar plum' style," continued Edgar, in a deprecating tone—"but I hate being bribed into goodness."

"Or flogged into it?" added Archie.

"No, I give my vote for the flogging,"

said Villiers, smiling, "I prefer strong measures."

"Well," said Archie, pushing back his cup, and getting up from his chair, "it's time for me to be off; I shall see if there's any sport to be had. Eh, Villiers, arn't you coming? I can provide you with a gun."

"Oh you don't want me," he replied, without moving from his seat.

"Oh, pooh—what's the row now! I say come along!"

"I don't think there is any game to be had," said Edgar, still not stirring.

"Man alive! come and see. You are not like Constance there, who classes the shooting of anything from a hyena to a black beetle, as a breakage of the sixth commandment."

"Don't be so ridiculous, Archie!"

"True as I stand here! Now what do you say, Villiers, after a day on the moors—do you need absolution?"

"Don't give me up as a reprobate, Miss Conyngham, if I confess to a strong tendency to murderous implements."

"'Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!' Constance, don't you feel your hair stand on end? I hope you are not given to manslaughter," said Archie, addressing Villiers in a voice of mock gravity.

"Not as a general rule," answered Villiers with a smile.

"Oh Archie, if you are going out," said Constance, seeing him preparing to depart; "be charitable and execute a little commission for me."

"If it isn't to take a basin of gruel to some of your Tom, Dick, and Harry's; and good little books, too, I wash my hands of them."

"Don't distress yourself, I only want you to inquire at Rawley's, for a book Katherine wants."

"Well, what is it?"

"Lady De Courcy, or The Woman of the World."

"As if she wasn't woman of the world enough herself! Well, you at least will need absolution, for so aiding and abetting the crime of novel reading."

"Is it no quarter with you, as regards all novels?" said Edgar to Constance.

"Oh dear no; I like some, oh so much, but for the most part they are only miserable hashes and réchauffés."

"Well, I think so too."

"Now, Villiers, that is a bit of humbug!" exclaimed Archie; "as if I didn't find you all but gone over 'David Copperfield,' the other day. I came with a message for your father, but all the answer I could get to my question as to whether he was at home, was 'O Agnes! O my soul!'"

"Ah!" said Villiers, with a laugh, as the quick blood mounted to his forehead, "you got the weak side of me that day."

"Or rather, Agnes did. Well, Constance, I won't forget the book. Come, Villiers, it is getting late, and I must be off."

Archie took up his hat, but Villiers still seemed inclined to linger, till another "Hallo, Villiers! are you never coming!" from Archie, in the hall, compelled him to wish Constance good bye, and follow.

When they were gone, Constance still sat on in the same position, her hands clasped on her knees, and her mind in a kind of reverie, till she heard voices on the stairs, and the door opened. She got up, unconsciously a sigh forced itself from her heart to her lips, and a troubled look of tears swept over her face, when a servant entered with a note.

"For me?" said Constance.

"No, Ma'am, for Miss Conyngham."

"I am going up, I will take it her."

She went to her sister's room, Katherine took the note: "Oh," she said, as she read it, "Lady Bowen wants us to go and drink

tea at her house this evening. She has one or two people coming, she thinks we might like to meet."

"Oh go by all means," said Constance, hurriedly, "you, and Effie, with Archie; I can't go, I don't want to go."

"But Archie won't, he detests tea parties."

"Oh, yes he will; though I do confess it is a doubtful kindness to be asked out to tea at that hour, but I'm sure he will go for this once."

When Archie returned, after a pugnacious growl over the "bore of tea parties, it was such precious slow work," he agreed at last to sacrifice himself at the shrine of the Bowen tea table. So after dinner, he, Katherine, and Effie, got into the carriage; Archie telling Constance as he departed, that she had better send a hearse to fetch him back, as he expected to expire from sheer ennui in Lady Bowen's drawing room. •

They were gone, and Constance, after find-

ing that her father was asleep, and her mother thought she would rather go to bed, than anything else, returned to the deserted drawing room. The hours of twilight were deepening into night, and the large room looked dark and dreary in the half light half darkness. On one corner of the centre table stood a solitary cup, flanked by a few slices of bread and butter, brought up for her lonely tea. She sat down before it, feeling very little disposed to eat anything. The evening was chilly, and the clouds that kept running races in the sky, threw a dark shadow on the face of the lawn; the wind was high, and toyed to and fro with the branches of a large elm that grew in front of the house, so as to send them every now and then with a strange booming sound, almost like the wail of human voices, against the window panes. Constance, tired and weary, leant back in her chair, and listened

to the sobbing, sighing tones of the moaning blast as it swept round the house with a sudden burst of fury like an enraged maniac, then sunk again into the all but inarticulate cry of a little child. A strange influence seemed upon her, for the shadow on the face of nature seemed creeping over her own heart also, and beneath it, her heart lay motionless as though clasped in an icy grasp. A stillness, scarce earthly, came over her; she sat there pale and motionless, her head bowed, and the pulses of life arrested into silence.

How long she knew not; time was not, even feeling was not, all sense of the present annihilated, and the perception of a total blank was all she was sensible of. At last some one opened the door, then it seemed as if the spell was broken, and passing her hand over her brow she got up, feeling as if she had just recovered from a sharp attack of illness. It was the servant announcing Mr. Villiers; she started.

"Miss Conyngham! I beg your pardon, I thought your brother was at home."

"They are all gone to spend the evening at Hawkmount, so I am alone," she said, but her voice sounded unnatural, and she tried to laugh, but it was a desperate attempt and a miserable failure. Villiers's tone and manner changed instantly—"You are not well; can I?—is anything the matter?"

There was an accent of intense tenderness in his voice, which brought the blood in crimson tides to Constance's cheeks.

"No—no thank you," she said, trying to rally herself—"You will have some tea?" He disclaimed all such intention, but she rang the bell, and candles and the urn made their entrance together, and Edgar was obliged to sit down, and let Constance pour him out some.

"So all your party have gone to Hawkmount," he said at length, when from a certain embarrassment at the sense of their

tête-à-tête, they had arrived at the end of the first cup without speaking: "Your brother did not tell me this morning that he was going out, or I should not have intruded on you so unpardonably."

"He didn't know it himself," replied Constance, doing her utmost to look tolerably natural and composed, as the lady of the house, "but papa is so much better, and Lady Bowen was so kind; and, in fact, the change would do every one good we thought."

"I am so glad to hear such a good account of Mr. Conyngham; I met Dr. Cowen just now, and his report was a perfect flourish of trumpets."

"Was it!—Oh I'm so glad!—I am sure, I mean I hope, papa will soon get quite well. He is now able to bear mamma's reading regularly to him for some time every day."

"Come! that does look like progress. I suppose you generally choose your literature

of an enlivening nature ; there is a new work of Thackeray's just come out—would Mrs. Conyngham like it—if she would, I have it, and it is entirely at her service.”

“Thank you,” she said, hesitatingly, and looking down, “I really don't know.” Thackeray and a sick bed seemed to her rather an incongruous conjunction.

“But, pray, let me send it.”

“No, please don't ; I'm sure she would rather not, I mean,” she said, colouring with the fear of being rude ; “often, at least generally, mamma reads a sermon, or something of that kind.”

“Oh !—yes, of course !” answered Edgar, in a tone as if that was quite a new light let in upon the subject. Then came a pause, and to break it Villiers became suddenly very solicitous in the matter of Mrs. Conyngham's health.

“I am afraid Mrs. Conyngham exerts herself too much. I remarked she was look-

ing very worn indeed the other day. I wonder the doctors don't prescribe rest, and quiet for her."

Constance smiled at the thoroughly man's idea of rest and quiet being purchasable like any other commodity, at a time when circumstances quite annihilated the possibility of the same.

"Mamma is so anxious about papa," she said, "she is always with him all day, and she quite tires herself out."

"And if I may say so, I think you do the same," replied Edgar gently.

"Oh no, indeed I don't," she said blushing, "only, of course, we have been all very anxious."

"Indeed it has been a very trying time for you all; but now, I trust, the cause for fear has passed."

"Yes, only the feeling of fear will still remain; when one learns to be anxious, it is a long time before one can unlearn it, I think."

"Perhaps so:" he grew silent again, and Constance, finding his unusual taciturnity that evening rather inopportune, began to cast about for a new subject of conversation, any how talking was less embarrassing than sitting silent: "What *shall* I say! Oh I know! Do you know this book?" she said, taking up a volume on the table, and holding it up to Edgar, to obviate the awful necessity of addressing him by name, "it used to be one of Sydney's studies—Oh but of course you do though—it is D'Israeli's."

"Coningsby!—Oh yes—it has only one fault, of being rather one phase of life, than life itself—the political phase I mean."

"And a very uninteresting one I should call it."

"Why every phase of life seems uninteresting, excepting to those who are interested in it."

Another pause, while Villiers moved all the books on the table in succession, till he

succeeded in moving them on to the floor. — “How unpardonably stupid of me!” he exclaimed, as he picked them up, “I hope they have none of them sustained any mortal injury. I am afraid, though, ‘Byron’ has fractured his skull.”

“Well, perhaps, considering all things, he had done that before,” answered Constance, laughing; “but as to poor Molière, unless he will call in efficient aid, I fear he will have a spine complaint all the rest of his days—but it doesn’t matter—pray don’t look so distressed about it, Mr. Villiers.”

“Poor Molière, it is a shame to treat him so disrespectfully.”

“I don’t see that; it is only treating him as he has treated one half of the world before.”

“For the edification of the other half then. ‘Tartuffe,’—What can equal ‘Tartuffe,’ for truth of drawing—it is so life-like.”

“Is it? I should be sorry to think so.”

"May I ask why?"

"Oh it makes people seem so bad."

"Pardon me, Miss Conyngham, but surely we cannot live long in the world, without adding to our creed this article of faith, that men are not angels."

"No, but some books make demons of them; besides, I don't know, I don't like to think about bad people; it seems to me most people are good."

"Well, I must confess, I rather enjoy a little spice of wickedness in the world; it keeps it from stagnation."

"I don't know," said Constance again; then she got up and moved from the table, as if the conversation pained her.

Edgar's eyes followed her with that genuine bewildered look of astonishment with which a man of the world always greets the pure simple mind of a young girl, upon whose stainless snow, the full glare of worldliness has never been let in; he understands it not,

for its crystal almost blinds his dim and blotted vision. Then the feeling changed, and instead rose up a sudden thrill of intense reverence and awe; from that hour she grew unto him as an angel, brooding over the night of his thoughts; and from henceforth, though he knew it only vaguely, and she knew it not at all, into her hands were given the keys of his happiness, as long ere that he had held those of her's.

Oh love on earth, so often dumb and voiceless; a time shall come when we shall know that thou art Heaven!

CHAPTER XII.

The stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill ;
Oh for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, oh sea ;
But the tender grace of a day that is fled,
Shall never come back to me.

Tennyson.

“So you’ve had that fellow Villiers here again,” said Archie, as he and his sisters came into the library on their return, “Come, I will say that for him, he doesn’t give us the chance of forgetting him.”

“He came to see you, Archie ; he didn’t

know you were out," said Constance, blushing rather inconveniently.

"Oh tell that to the marines!"

"How very strange," said Katherine, in her measured tones: "Really once a day, I do think, would do for his visits."

"So he doesn't seem to think, my wise sister."

"Then you might give him a hint."

"Not I! let the fellow please himself, and I'm sure he pleases me."

"But there is a want of propriety in it."

"Hang your proprieties! Well, Conny, how are the folk above stairs?"

"Papa has been sometime asleep—he seems quite comfortable."

"That's all right, and mamma, of course she isn't sitting up, or anything, of that kind."

"Oh no, there is no need for that now; in fact, I believe it worries papa, rather than not."

"So I should say, enough to drive a fellow mad."

"Well, did you enjoy yourselves," said Constance, with an attempt to seem interested.

"Oh awfully slow!" muttered Archie.

"Nonsense, Archie," said Effie, "I'm sure Lady Bowen was very kind; and oh, Constance, she asked when we should be going to town, because she said it would be so nice if we could be near each other! Wouldn't it? Why your wits look as if they were wool-gathering.—What have you been doing?"

"Doing! why nothing, only I think I am rather tired—good night," and seizing a candle Constance disappeared rather precipitately. Effie, after indulging in a few more yawns and reminiscences of the evening's entertainment, began to mount the stairs too, only restrained by Katherine's "Do be quiet" from making an assault on her mother's room, to enlighten her with

all the sayings of Lady Bowen, and the bon-mots of Master Augustus Reginald Bowen, heir apparent of the family.

The clock on the stairs had told twelve, and ere its last vibration died away, to Constance, who still sat only partially undressed, in her room, it came mingled with a moan. Her room was over Mr. Conyng-ham's—and fear in an instant took the alarm—gathering up hastily her hair that unheeded hung in disorder about her wan weary-look face, she threw her dressing gown round her and crept down stairs; she listened at her father's door—the sound seemed repeated—so she gently opened it and stole softly in; shading the light with her hand, she crept up to the bed, and drew back the curtains. Her father lay in a kind of half slumber, his features distorted with pain and flushed with fever, while every now and then a moan forced its way from his lips. Presently he started and turned; and

opening his eyes, grasped the counterpane convulsively, and muttered something indistinctly. Constance put down the candle, and bent down to catch the words. "I tell you it is useless," she heard him murmur in a kind of dreamy tone, between sleeping and waking, "Why will you tease me so—I have no money left—do you hear—I tell you we are ruined;" and the words came with a hissing sound through the closed lips, that seemed to shut down upon it with an accent of despair. Constance heard, and a feeling of terror smote quick upon her heart. "He is but dreaming," she said to herself, in that decided tone which often only reveals the doubt within: "Perhaps it would be better to wake him, Papa!" Her father turned and opened his eyes, "Who's that?" he said, trying to make out her face.

"I, papa—Constance."

"Eh! What! I can't see!—Who is it?"

"Oh, papa—don't you know me? It is I—Constance."

"Is it? Oh yes, certainly; I beg your pardon. I think I must have been dreaming—Good night, my dear—80,000 pounds gone—all gone—What a smash it will be. Eh! What did you say?—Certainly, most happy."

Oh the horror that shot through Constance. He must be delirious, and she sprang to the bell, to ring for assistance, when her arm was suddenly grasped tight by her father, and with a great effort groaning out "Don't," he pulled her closer and closer till he had drawn her down beside the bed, bringing her face to a level with his.

There was a silence of some minutes, and when at last he spoke, though the bewildered expression had passed from his countenance his voice sounded strange and unnatural. "I've something to say to you, child; can you bear it? Don't, if you are afraid."

She was trembling in every nerve before, but now stilling with one strong effort, the

quivering of her frame, she said quietly—
“I am quite ready, papa.”

He looked at her in silence, as if he couldn't make up his mind to speak, but she heard him murmur to himself, “Better now—better get it over”—but still it seemed as if the words would not come, and he appeared inclined to wander off again into another track.

“Papa.”

“Well, child.”

“You had something to tell me—will you not tell me now?”

“Do you wish it?”

“Yes.”

“Have your wish then,”—the words came up with an unearthly sound—“I am ruined—there!—Go!” He pushed her from him, with a bitter mocking laugh; but she did not move, not even a muscle of her face changed—it only grew almost unnatural in its calmness.

At last Mr. Conyngham spoke again ; much he talked of mortgages and loans, of the estate having been encumbered for the last few generations ; of sums he had lost in speculations entered into with the hope of retrieving past losses ; but now the time of reckoning had come, and the state of things could no longer be concealed. The storm had been gathering for a long time, but the night when he was first taken ill, had brought tidings how near it was to burst. He ended by saying — “ A week or two more, and everything must be known, and Constance, why I have told all this to you, is, that you have a clearer head than the rest of them, and I will trust you to break the tidings gently to your poor mother ;” then his voice sank into an audible groan, and he turned his head away on his pillow.

Little could Constance understand of the “ hows” and “ whys” of the case, but from the ravelled web of causes and consequences

one fact at least she managed to disentangle, they were ruined, and the words closed like ice round her heart.

“Papa, don’t fret so, please,” and her hand was laid gently on his shoulder; “it won’t be so bad as you think; it might have been worse; we have you still.”

Oh true woman! Suffering thyself, yet not letting others see that thou sufferest.

“Hush, child, hush,” groaned her father, “you don’t know what you say:” he grasped her arm so tightly that it became almost unbearable pain—“I tell you, not a blade of grass on this place—Balcombe Priory—is mine—it must be given up soon—soon! aye at once.”

Constance did not start; she only said, “It is not the place that makes the happiness; don’t vex yourself, papa, it will all be for the best, indeed it will: now, papa, you must not talk any longer, or you will be ill again.”

He looked up almost wonderingly at that

pleading, earnest face bending over him, and he felt the soothing accents of her voice falling like snow-flakes on the hot fever of his heart. She shook up his pillows, moved quietly to the table, poured out a composing draught, and brought it to him. He took it, then yielding to the spell of her presence, laid his head down again on his pillow with all the unquestioning obedience of a little child, while she took up a book and began to read aloud, in a subdued voice, hoping so to lull the restlessness of his thoughts into slumber. Minutes, half hours passed, and still Constance read on, though the heavy breathing of the patient had long since told how kindly sleep had moved her soft fingers over the web of life, and stilled for a time its ceaseless working. Still she read on ; the monotonous sound of the one uniform tone falling on the ear like the ceaseless patter of rain-drops on the window pane, but conveying to her brain no definite impression. She knew not what

she read, she knew not why she read ; she only felt the need of some outward mechanism to restrain the unmeasured throbbing of the wild pulses within, which seemed to range themselves into something like order and harmony, by means of the unmeaning melody her voice was weaving for them. Yet her heart was beating to a far different tune ; listen, and hear. “ Oh Edgar, must I give you up ? Oh that it were only not wrong ! How can I live without you, oh Edgar ! My life will be a blank, and yours ?—your happiness, to ensure which I would die ten thousand deaths ; am I right to sacrifice that, to a scruple ? no, not a scruple, a principle, perhaps ; but should—ought a principle to be dearer to me than your happiness ? (Oh my head, how it whirls !) If I were sure I were only to suffer—but you love me, you love me ! Oh bliss ! Oh joy ! What do I say ? nay, oh misery ! And yet—and yet I love you with a love, strong as life, power-

ful as death, and infinite as eternity—my heart will break—oh God !”

The book fell from her hands, and laying the bowed head upon her knees, minute after minute told slowly out its knell of misery on her crushed and wounded spirit. Hour after hour went by, and brought no change in her position ; her heart lay dead within her ; the icicles of despair had gathered round the fibres of each living hope, and numbed them into unconsciousness. No control had she over her thoughts ; the phantom forms of love and sorrow came and went at will on the blurred and blotted image of her mind ; the horizon of her soul was dark with dread, and the lesser lights of life lay quenched in dimness, between the shadow of some one all-engrossing woe. What was this pain, that from the depths of peace had suddenly welled up into misery ? Her hour of trial—the hour that once in a life-time comes to all, had come to her ; she had reached one of

those cross-roads of existence, wherein the paths of life sever, and a definite choice must be made between the right and the wrong. That evening had become one of those epochs, which are as datums in our existence, wherein, over the horizon of our old life, the dawning of a new life begins; and casting aside the swaddling bands of infancy, we rise up and walk, either in the power of a new-found joy, or in the strength of an immeasurable woe.

Edgar Villiers loved her: oh joy, she knew it—but his religion was but a name; oh sorrow, she knew that too! Archie's words that morning had been, as it were, the final opening of her eyes, and the vague doubt that had been gathering day by day, and week by week, rose up before her now, suddenly arrested into the full growth of certainty. In vain she strove to shut out the thought from her heart: as the still hours of night told out their ended span on the dial-

plate of time, the Past unfolded leaf by leaf, the storied records of the last few weeks, and held up unpityingly before her shrinking gaze the blazoned chronicle of word after word, and speech after speech, of Edgar Villiers, which she would have given worlds at that moment to have sunk down for ever in the unfathomable gulfs of an infinite oblivion. She remembered, and each word thrilled with startling intensity on her sickening soul, how, when her father's life hung upon a gossamer thread, and her own soul was writhing with fear for the hereafter,—how little Edgar Villiers had understood even the cause of her grief—

“He was quieter, calmer, at least they might be thankful, the doctors said; he did not feel much pain, even if the end must come, what comfort to know it would be without suffering:” all which she heard, and felt the tone of intense feeling with which it was uttered; feeling of love, sorrow, sympathy,

not for the fate of the immortal spirit, but for the struggles of the clayey tabernacle; not because a priceless soul was hovering over the boundless abyss of eternity, but because the eyes of the living were weeping for the passage of the dead, and the heart of the loved one breaking with the thought of what might be the fate of him who was passing away from the land of shows and shadows, to that country where the things that *were* are forgotten in the things that *are* for evermore. "But oh!" moaned on the deathless strength of poor clinging earthly love, "what will life be without him?" Alas! the sickening crushing of the heart gave back the answer: "and what with him?" She dared not think: in that silent chamber, in the still hours of night, she dared not resolve to convert her life into a garden of Eden by braving the flaming sword of the cherubim that guarded its entrance. "Aye, if there were but this life," she murmured to herself, and the echo

of her heart answered her, "Aye, *if* there were." Then thought cleared the space between, and the end came full upon her soul—the dying bed, the parting pang, and the hereafter! It was intolerable! She started up, and going to the window, drew back the curtain and looked out. There was already a blush on the cheek of day, for dawn was stealing softly up behind the horizon, and her footsteps were heard among the hills. A veil of grey, however, still lay soft and heavy on the face of nature; but by degrees it slowly melted away into light, as the sun rose and painted the yet uncoloured sky with hues of rainbow beauty.

Constance stood and watched, till its beams leaving heaven for earth, laid a kiss on the white tip of the old church spire, then danced on, and played hide and seek among the whispering trees; quivered on the waving fields, and with a sudden effort flashed a golden glory on the ivy-clad walls of the

house itself, till the whole landscape grew actually dazzling with light. She saw it all : all its overpowering beauty flowed in upon her soul, and she remembered they were ruined !

She let fall the curtain, and sat down. Swift before her memory came the records of past days, sunset evenings, bright hours, and things that ne'er should be again ; the land of her childhood was fast fading from her view, and the hills of an irrevocable past lay between her and it : the knell of her old life had already sounded, and tolling slowly through the mist of fading years, the funeral of her youth would soon be buried out of her sight.

One moment something within told her, it was for the last time she gathered up the flowers of love from her heart, hung over them in the speechless rapture of unuttered tears, then laid them one by one on the altar of faith, and saw them slowly burn into

ashes. Then wrapping the grave-clothes about her heart to hide its wound from view, she rose up there, her face towards the east, to begin from henceforth the new life that was to be evolved from the ruins of the old.

CHAPTER XIII.

I changed the cruel prayer I made,
And bowed my meekened face, and prayed
That God would do His will, and thus
He did it——He parted us,
And His sun shone victorious,
—— and I am calm,
And Heaven is wakening a new psalm.

And a sense of tune,
A satisfied love meanwhile,
Which nothing early could despise,
Sang on within her soul.

E. B. Browning.

SOME lives are counted by years, others
by sufferings: one day may contain an
eternity of sorrow, and in one moment may
be compressed the agony of a life. When
Constance rose up next morning, she felt

that her childhood had passed from her for ever; that phase of her life was over, and another one had begun: from henceforth its watch-word would be patience, and its key-note, pain.

"Bless me, Miss Constance, what is the matter with you?" said the old nurse, Gibson, as she met Constance on the stairs, on her way to the breakfast-room—"you look white as a sheet—'pon my word you do."

"Do I, nurse?" said Constance, with a faint smile, "well I do feel rather tired—I don't think I slept much last night."

"Slept!—I should think not—you do look bad—for goodness sake, Miss Constance, get a little more colour into those cheeks, or what will somebody say—Ah there!—you've roses enough to spare now:" and the old nurse smiled significantly, as the eloquent blood dyed Constance's face with a sudden deep and burning crimson.

"Don't keep me, please, nurse, I'm late,"

and Constance hurried on down the stairs. She reached the breakfast-room, laid her hand on the lock, and stopped one moment, to smooth her brow, and bid the muscles of her face relax. A hard task had to be performed; to her, her father had confided the task of preparing her mother and sisters for the ruin that was to come upon them all, and she must conceal the yet more engrossing agony that was settling down upon her own heart, to which that sorrow was but as an added drop to an already overflowing cup, a scarcely noticed unit in an aggregate of misery. What! play the part of consoler and strengthener to those who should have been both to her. How could she?—What, smile, and smile, and smile, when her very life was bleeding away within?

One earnest prayer—"Lord, be Thou the strength of my life, whom then shall I fear—Lord, be Thou the strength of my heart, of whom then shall I be afraid:"—The lock

was grasped in the firm hold of faith, it turned and she entered.

Mrs. Conyngham and Katherine were the only occupants of the room, for Archie had long ago dispatched his own breakfast, and Effie had gone out into the garden, preparatory to hers. It was a bright day in the beginning of spring, one of those transparent days which stand as a link between the sharp coldness of winter, and the hot breath of summer, when the sky is of that clear blue that seems to shine through the light of tears, while the earth gleams fresh and fair, like the unsullied joy of a youthful heart, and the young leaves, untainted yet by the dust of the world, quiver to and fro with their burden of delight in the glad burst of golden sunshine. The window was open and the glorious sights and sounds of the outer world looked in and flickered backwards and forwards on the cool green paper, bright carpet, and snowy table

cloth, filling all the room with brightness and perfume.

Katherine was making breakfast: her fine dark hair gathered into a crown round her head, and her tall figure draped in a morning dress of quiet elegance, while Mrs. Conyngham, feeling better than usual under the influence of fine weather and camomile tea, had accomplished the uncommon feat of appearing at the breakfast table at the very early hour of ten.

"You will persuade, papa, now, won't you?" Constance heard her sister say, in a very energetic tone, as she opened the door--

"Dr. Cowen says he is so much better, that in a fortnight, we may go to town, and really to give a ball with those shabby curtains!"

"Well, my dear, we'll see about it," replied her mother, in a deprecatory tone, "when we are there, it will do to see about them."

"No, but it won't, mamma--you know

how long it takes papa to make up his mind about anything, and it is of no use to give a ball when there is no one to give it to, it is always better early in the season."

"Of course, my dear—but at present your poor papa—if he is only well enough."

"Oh, mamma, how provoking you are, of course he will be. Dr. Cowen said so only yesterday, besides he wants rousing Dr. Cowen said;—the change will do him good. Well then, it's all settled—and we may send out our invitations for the 6th of next month—let me see—no, that won't be long time enough, better be the 16th of May, that will leave a good six weeks."

"What are you talking about," said Constance, looking up with a disturbed countenance, as she seated herself at the breakfast table.

"Oh, only about our ball."

"Our ball!" repeated Constance, in an incredulous tone, her face actually growing blank with dismay.

“Well! you look as wild as a March hare. What’s the matter?—Is there anything very awful in the idea?”

Yes—there was something very awful, and Constance bent her head over her plate, to conceal her face, as unawares she transferred the contents of her plate into her lap.

A ball! and they ruined! Oh the fearful mockery of it; it was walking on a volcano with the warning notes of a coming explosion sounding up unheeded into their very ears: it was venturing on ice, with but one layer of frozen water between them and the roaring waters of death, a thousand feet below!

“Good morning to you, ladies;” called out a merry voice, and throwing the window open wider, in bounded Effie, with ‘Fido’ in her arms. How pretty she looked! Her eyes bright with the light of early morning, and her cheeks glowing with exercise, her shining hair falling in such glistening curls

about her childish face, and the slight little figure with the flowing dress gathered in with a belt at the waist. She threw herself into a seat—"Give me something to eat, pray—Oh, I'm so hungry, and what is more, as farmer Hick's little boy says, 'I'm horrid fond of hot rolls and butter.'—How's papa."

"Oh much better," replied Katherine, "I looked in and he was asleep."

"So did I—so if you don't know more than that, I needn't come to you for information."

"Oh, my dear," interposed her mother, "but sleep is the very thing of all others for him. I went in just to persuade him to try a little camomile tea before his breakfast (an excellent thing for the appetite, poor dear old Dr. Cathcart used to say), and he was quite sound asleep, I assure you."

"Proof of his wisdom, mamma, he knew you were approaching with the camomile."

"Never mind the camomile," interrupted

Katherine—"What do you say, Effie, to the 16th of May for our ball?"

"Here—do you mean?"

"Nonsense!—No, in London. Dr. Cowen says papa will be quite himself in another week, so of course we shall go up to town as soon after that as possible."

"The 16th—oh yes—only I think the 23rd the better, that will be giving papa a still longer time to quite right himself.—My birthday too—oh that will be glorious! and, mamma, we'll have, O I don't know how many musicians this time."

"And, mamma, you'll let us have the new curtains, won't you?" continued Katherine, "and an awning over the balcony, like the Merriotts had last year."

"Yes—oh yes, what fun!—you'll coax papa into it, won't you, like a dear darling mamma as you are," said Effie, jumping up and half smothering her mother with kisses to the detriment of cuffs and collars—"Oh

how charming!—just look at Constance, she looks wild!”

“You don’t mean it, do you?” gasped poor Constance.

“Mean it, to be sure we do,” said Katherine.

“Mean it, why of course,” replied Effie, jumping up and down in her chair; “and I’ll have a new dress, blue, looped up with silver acorns, and we’ll have the whole world, and all the stars of the first magnitude we can find.”

“Papa isn’t fit for it yet,” articulated Constance, “and it was only the other day we had a party.”

“Is that any reason why we should not have another?” said Katherine.

“A party here,” exclaimed Effie. “Oh don’t call that a party at all; only an interminable labyrinth of Tyrrels and Jamiesons, from which you only emerge to fall into another maze of Bowens and Cowens.”

“And Miss Lilly Dawson, with her everlasting pink barége and pink cheeks, and young Charles Evandale, as everlasting pendant to the same,” continued Katherine.

“Oh it was good fun the last time; I wanted a few presentable partners for one or two of my prime favourites, but the only tidy specimen of mankind that came to the show was Edgar Villiers. I felt very much inclined to propose he should be raffled for; but—heyday, Constance, upset the sugar basin—well pick it up again then, and if Dr. Johnson himself were here, he couldn’t say anything wiser:” and then, Effie, pushing back her chair, without waiting to finish her sentence, seized her bonnet and went out again into the garden. Her mother and Katherine followed; the former to go to her husband, and the latter to her Berlin work.

Constance was left alone. Life she felt for her was beginning—life with its main spring

revealed ; not as it had been hitherto, merely its mechanism, overlaying and concealing the pulse at its heart ; unconsciously she repeated the word "life," and what was life ? Oh puny syllable, uttered on earth, and developed in Heaven ! Life !—was life the rolling for a few weary hours round the dusty Park, was it edging one's way through a crowded ball-room, or spending one's days in the discussion of the most fashionable shaped sleeve, or the last new novel : nay, even the fuss of politics, the din of war, the solid money-making efforts of the practical man, what were they all—what would they all be a hundred years hence—nay, twenty years hence—nay, even to-morrow.

No, there must be something truer still. At the heart of that outer existence of habit and custom, there must beat some mighty pulse, some all-sufficient mainspring, if one could but get at it. She got up from her seat, and going to the window looked out

upon the world, but the world gave her no answer. Life there was in abundance, strong, exuberant joyful life, but it was too exuberant, too joyful for a heart on which the shadow of sorrow was beginning to fall. The sunlight that flickered, so like a thing of life on the trees — what had it to do with her; with her who had already entered the Jordan of affliction, and knew not whether its waters would divide as a wall on her right hand and her left, that she might pass through on dry land, or gathering themselves into one mighty mass, roll its volume of waves down upon the place of the slain. No; she felt she must look beyond, and her gaze fled up to the sky. Not an hour ago, the eyelids of Heaven had been wet with tears, and the brightness of its glory came chastened through their light; for the fleecy clouds, like angel wings, drooped their quiet shadow here and there, as they floated on like a

past sorrow through the depths of the firmament's blueness. She was answered. Life—What was life? "This is life eternal, to know Thee, the true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

"Meditating — eh?" said Effie's voice behind her. "Come, you've stood long enough staring at nothing; see what I've got, isn't it, in Gerald's phrase, a 'tip top' Camelia?"

"Charming, but what a pity to pick it."

"Why I thought it looked as if it were in for the jaundice, so I cured it effectually by picking it."

"It would have lived long enough, if you had only let it alone, I don't doubt."

"Then it won't have the opportunity, that's all; now I'm going to be generous and give it you, as I don't want it myself—there now, let me put it in your band."

She knelt down, while Constance looked at her silently for some minutes. Should she tell

her? Nay, how could she bear to dim the sunny brightness of that young life? Her eye took in all the graceful contour of the childish figure, and the pretty head, with its crown of glory locks; the sparkle of the eye; the wavy curl of the lip, and the aspect of refinement over all, down to the single ornament, the massy gold bracelet on the wrist—how could she bear it—how fight, and jostle, and labour her way through the world, and bear all that must be borne—the contempt of the rich, the pity of the little, and the galling sympathy of the vulgar-minded. Oh faithless heart! He whose love had created and redeemed her, would not that also preserve her?

“There now, look and admire,” said Effie, “I declare you look quite elegant, don’t you think so?”

Constance’s answer was a kiss, then bending over her, she put back the bright hair from her face, and gazed thoughtfully on

her brow: "Effie, do you think you could bear sorrow?"

"Sorrow! I don't know, I never tried—why?"

"Because I have something I want to tell you, and it is unpleasant *rather*."

"Tell me quickly then—why don't you speak?—you know I can bear anything better than suspense!" exclaimed Effie, with the impatience of temper that had not yet learnt the long-suffering that endureth all things. With a strong effort Constance commanded her voice to answer,

"What should you say if we left this place, Balcombe?"

"Left it! Oh! for a little while you mean, why I should like it."

"No, Effie, not for a little while — for ever!" and she burst into tears.

Effie looked startled. "Constance, what do you mean? tell me," she said, pulling her sister's arm, regardless of her distress.

"Dearest," said Constance, choking back her tears, "Papa is not so rich as he was, so he thinks—I mean probably we may go away from here."

"Go and live abroad a little, eh?—does he intend that, well that won't be so bad, will it, eh? We might go to Rome; no, Venice is the pleasantest, I want to see the gondolas; when one wishes to go out, instead of ordering the carriage to order a boat, oh! won't that be funny! Why, I think it's a charming idea, and when shall we go, soon do you think?"

"Soon enough, I daresay," replied her sister almost bitterly, then changing her tone, she said earnestly, "Listen to me, Effie, things are worse than you think—Effie, we are beggars."

Euphemia gave an incredulous glance at her sister's face, read the truth in her eyes, then threw herself on the floor, and cried violently. "Beggars! oh! how cruel," was all she could articulate.

Constance saw, in her anxiety to make her understand the case, she had put it too strongly. "No, darling, you mistake me; I only mean we can't have so many luxuries and things as we used."

But the idea of being beggars had taken firm hold of Effie's imagination, and she continued to sob resolutely, "Oh! I know I shall die if they make me a beggar, I know I shall—"

"But no one is going to do it, dearest, it is only my stupid way of putting things," answered Constance, secretly condemning her extreme foolishness. "We may go and live somewhere else, perhaps, that's all—you like change—you know—so it mayn't be so bad; and we shall have a nice little house, and you'll help to be housekeeper,"—and she put her arm round her, and made her rest her head on her shoulder.

"Shall I?" said Effie, already beginning to be consoled, "and may I give out the stores and all the sweet things for dessert?"

"Yes," answered her sister with a sigh, as she thought how few things there probably would be for any one to give out.

"And Fido, and all my birds, and my parrot, they'll come too, won't they?"

"Oh yes, I hope so."

"And I'll be such a nice little house-keeper, see if I won't; order such *récherché* little dinners, not expensive, you know, won't that be nice?"

"Yes," said her sister mechanically.

"And, Constance, don't you think it will please papa to see me so useful! I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll work papa embroidered waistcoats, that will save the tailor's bill you know."

"Or you might sew the buttons on his shirts," said Constance, suggesting something that was rather more likely to be useful in the present state of things than embroidered waistcoats, with no opportunity for wearing them.

"Oh, yes, and Kate's Berlin work will make up into such nice cushions, and make the rooms look so pretty."

Worked cushions with no drawing room to put them in! to make that look pretty which had first to be made habitable! What mockery it seemed, but Constance was too thankful to see her sister smiling again, a second time to try and make her realize the truth, it would come soon enough she thought, and in the mean time, what did it matter? She would scarcely weep more then, because she was smiling now. So she let her talk on, and listened and answered her, and almost forgot her own sorrow in the effort to make her sister forget hers. At last, when she saw this had succeeded, she got up from her seat, and was creeping slowly out of the room, just before she closed the door, she looked back a moment: Effie was seated on the ground putting Fido through a series of postures, by courtesy called dancing, and her

face was as bright as if no cloud had ever come to shadow it. "Now, Fido, behave yourself," she heard her say ; "oh, you good dog ! there ! now stand on two legs like a gentleman ! Stupid fellow ! what a strong predeliction you have for standing on four."

"What can be the reason," thought Constance to herself as she went up stairs, "there is Effie, not so very much younger than I am, a very child in everything—while I—I am bowed to the earth, and crushed down to the dust by an anguish, an agony, of which she guesses nought, and perhaps could feel nought. What ! am I complaining ? Oh Lord, who temperest the wind to the shorn lamb,"—the head was bent yet lower, "if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done !"



